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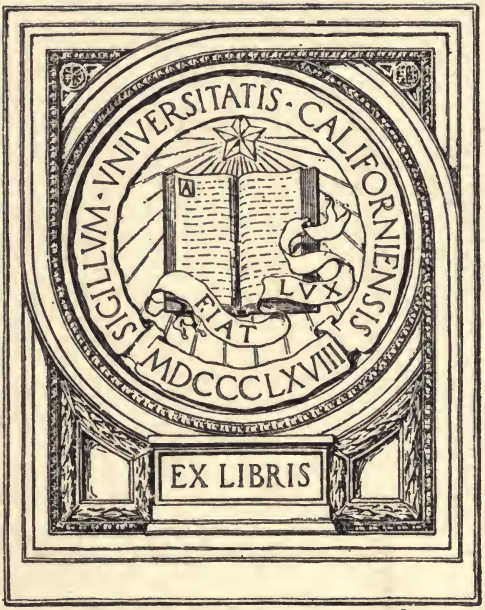
THE THIEF

HENRY BERNSTEIN



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THE THIEF

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CALIFORNIA

HENRY BERNSTEIN

THE THIEF

A Play in Three Acts

BY

HENRY BERNSTEIN

TRANSLATED BY

JOHN ALAN HAUGHTON

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

PROFESSOR RICHARD BURTON

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

GARDEN CITY NEW YORK
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY
1915

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TO MY BROTHER

▼

INTRODUCTION

REGARDED as an object of study, a play may be of special interest for any one of several reasons. It may appeal primarily because of thesis and the intellectual stimulus thus afforded. It may have chief value for expressional qualities, so that we speak of it as a piece of literature, meaning not so much theme or treatment as the way in which the dramatist has clothed his thought in language. Plays that are undramatic in this sense, may possess this charm, make this claim upon our regard. Or again, a play the subject-matter of which is not so important in itself and which is negligible in respect of style, may be interesting and have worth for the sheer craftsmanship with which the stage story is handled. Its technic will be illuminating to all who by the thoughtful examination of dramatic material seek to learn something of the secret of success whereby a cross-section of life is set upon the boards of a playhouse in such fashion as to hold increasingly the pleasurable attention of a general audience.

It is to the third category that Bernstein's famous drama, "The Thief," belongs. Viewed dramaturgically, it is one of the most brilliant achievements of the modern stage. Its success in France was but the beginning of its success in other lands. It is emphatically one of those dramas independent of national borders for the reason that its appeal is that of a story so cunningly devised and adapted to theatrical demands, and so plausible in its manipulation of modern human beings placed in circumstances that try their souls, as to compel suspensive attention on the part of auditors.

In these days, when so many dramas are witnessed which, whatever other virtues they possess, are removed as far as possible from the "well-made piece" of the French, it is well to have in mind for appreciative study a play like "The Thief"; and in analyzing our enjoyment of it to remind ourselves that, after all, the central purpose of all drama is to impart pleasure by the artistic representation of human beings and that a very special skill is necessary (quite apart from any question of inspiration) to secure that result. The technic of the stage story, the resourceful way in which stage limitations are met and overcome, is a considerable factor in the welfare of any

play. It is no exaggeration to say that, in this masterpiece of Bernstein, without his deft and ingenious conductment of the fable, the whole structure, revealing its frailness, would collapse like a house of cards.

It should be understood, however, that in emphasizing the technic of such a *tour de force*, I do not overlook its human appeal and its decided social interest. Love is a wonderful passion, and its ramifications in human psychology are beyond estimate. We may not admire a wife who, through love of her husband and with the desire to bind him the closer to her, steals money that she may buy clothes with which to make herself more attractive to him. But given the type, we can understand the motive and sympathize with her piteous case. And back of her, to give a larger meaning and lift the play into social significance, is a suggestion of the danger of the social system which can breed ideals so false as to lead to such a situation. Even women who feel themselves to be superior to the glamor of clothes can perhaps afford to forgive one of the sex who exaggerates their power.

At the same time, one feels that the social appeal of the play is secondary to story value and the excellent dramatic opportunity offered by such an inven-

tion. It remains in essence a wonderfully clever story play, a technical performance of the first rank.

Bernstein's power to convey through terse, stript idiom the psychology of modern men and women is unquestionable. He is an effective and forceful writer, while by no means on the level of literary attainment with dramatists like Brieux, Porto Riche, Hervieu, and Donnay. Sober French criticism would deny him any place with such theatre artists. Yet in the business of wringing dramatic values out of his theme—values that too often in his hands become theatric as well—he may be said to excel them all. The greater the familiarity with dramatic construction, with its demands for exposition, development, and climactic effects, the deeper must be the admiration for a writer who in plays like "The Thief," "Samson," and "Israel," to mention but three, exhibits so complete a knowledge of the specific requirements of theatre art.

Bernstein throws his drama into the favorite modern three-act form. This permits him, according to regular construction, after a first act devoted to exposition and a blocking out of the story, to use the second act to develop it to a climax; the final act having for its mission the unravelling of the com-

plication. He departs from this ordinary procedure in an interesting way. His first act is in a technical particular remarkable; indeed, I do not recall a parallel in the drama to-day. It is commonly and justly said that a dramatist, unlike a novelist, must not conceal his intention from the audience. He must give at least an inkling of his purpose, and the proper pleasure of the auditors is to be found in this knowledge of theirs, so superior to that of the blind puppets on the stage. The interest and excitement inhere in watching how in their blindness they will act, and with what skilful manipulation of material the playwright reaches his resolution.

But in "The Thief," Bernstein appears to violate this principle of stage craft. The whole first act throws the audience quite off the scent. The young man, Fernand, is the person upon whom is fastened the theft; and a thrilling surprise is sprung—you can hear the naïve gasp go through the house—when in act two it is shown that the wife is the real culprit. Of this unusual stroke of technic it can be said that Bernstein sees fit to make use of a sort of detective-tale interest, and has with much wisdom placed it so early in the play, namely, in the expository act, that the false twist given the story does not affect the

hearers as it most likely would were such a surprise kept back and introduced in the main climax of the drama. There, its clever trick of fooling the audience might have been resented. Where it is, it merely adds a novelty of interest, and no doubt contributes to the attraction of the piece as a whole. So complete is the mystification that the play seems over before it is more than well begun. The audience, having been promised a three-act piece, remains to discover why two following acts are necessary.

The central act offers what is certainly one of the most effective situations of the modern theatre. Little by little, the coils have closed about the weak, slight, lovable Marie-Louise, and we look on with ever-increasing tension as she begins to fight for her love life, and see her at last, cornered and desperate, as the husband, his suspicions more and more awakened, forces her to confess, and she pleads pathetically for forgiveness and strives to keep him by her side. The author here penetrates into the very heart of character and carries us with him. The psychology of Marie-Louise is masterly. Her motive for the theft, had it not been carefully prepared for, would have seemed false or insufficient; the plausibility of both character and scene would have

been imperilled. But as she is gradually unfolded to us in the preceding act, and further developed in the *scene à faire*, we can understand and be sorry. Whatever her limitations, and they are obvious, she is, according to her nature, deeply, honestly in love; and, be it noted, with her own husband! Marie-Louise strikes one as a woman drawn from the life. Story play as "The Thief" is, when we contemplate this tempted and tortured wife, it almost seems, after all, a comedy of character.

The Gallic frankness of treatment in this scene, which was softened in the American performances, must be accepted with a tolerant understanding of the difference between the conventions of the two lands. The present excellent translation is much closer to the original than the version heard in our theatres. Unlike many final acts of good plays, the third act of "The Thief" sustains the interest and rounds out the story satisfactorily without wresting character for the sake of plot. The husband's jealous suspicion of Fernand is entirely natural, and his pardon of his wife and belief that she has told the truth in respect of her relation to Fernand can be accepted as in character, in spite of his crazed attitude the night before, also natural under the circum-

stances. In permitting the tender good-bye scene between Marie-Louise and Fernand, Richard rises in our estimation, whereas if he had cross-examined the lad to confirm his wife's statement, he would have been correspondingly lowered. One feels that there is a chance for happiness for the married pair in South America, since they have both learned their lesson.

Bernstein is a dramatist of the Boulevard, sensitive to the hectic, high-strung cosmopolitanism of the French capitol and set on giving Parisians the emotional entertainment they crave. He has the feeling for dramatic contrasts, individual and social; and, aware that love is the solar appeal of life, he weaves his plots around it. He is urban, mundane, in his types, plots, and preferences. We must take him as he is, and profit by his conspicuous ability to give enthralling interest to some of the crises of human fate which arise under present social conditions.

RICHARD BURTON.

Played for the first time at the Théâtre de la Renaissance, December 7, 1906, with the following cast:

Richard Voysin, age 35 . . . M. M. LUCIEN GUITRY
Raymond Lagardes, age 43. . . . FELIX HUGUENET
Monsieur Zambault, afterward Monsieur Gondoin } age 40 to 50 . ARGIULLIÈRE
Fernand Lagardes, age 18 . . . . ROGER VINCENT
A Servant
Marie Louise Voysin, age 23 . MME. SIMONE LE BARGY
Isabella Lagardes, age 26 . . MADELEINE VERNEUIL

CHARACTERS

RICHARD VOYSIN, friend and business associate of Lagardes
RAYMOND LAGARDES, a coffee merchant
M. ZAMBAULT, later known as M. GONDOIN . . . } a detective
FERNAND LAGARDES } son of Raymond by a former marriage
A VALET DE CHAMBRE
MARIE LOUISE VOYSIN, wife of Richard
ISABELLA LAGARDES, second wife of Raymond

Time: Present

Place: Country house of the Lagardes near Paris

Act I. *The Drawing-room: after dinner.*
Act II. *Bedroom of the Voysins: late the same night.*
Act III. *The Library: nine o'clock the next morning.*

THE THIEF

ACT I

A large drawing-room in a fine country house. On the left, two windows opening to the floor give on to a conservatory which in turn opens directly on to the park outside. At the right, a door into the hall. The furnishings of the drawing-room and conservatory are luxurious and elegant. The two rooms are tastefully lighted, and through the conservatory doors are seen in the moonlight trees and a well-kept lawn. It is early in September.

The curtain rises discovering all the characters. It is just after dinner and they are seated around the room, the men wearing dinner coats, except MONSIEUR ZAMBAULT, *who is in full evening dress. The women wear dinner gowns.*

ISABELLE [*to* RICHARD, *who is sitting on a sofa beside* MARIE-LOUISE]. Chartreuse, Richard?

RICHARD. No, thanks, Beauty.

ISABELLE. What! You're not going to take any?

RICHARD. I'd *like* to, my dear Isabelle.

ISABELLE. Well, then, why not?

RICHARD. Because I haven't a spare hand. [*He holds a cup of coffee in one hand and* MARIE-LOUISE *has possession of the other.*]

MARIE-LOUISE. Bear! I don't want your old paw! I was just about to let go of it!

RICHARD. Yes, my love; yes, my little duck.

MARIE-LOUISE. Oh! that smile! Go away, you fascinator! Now I forbid you to make your Bourbon face, do you hear? Richard, do you hear me?

RICHARD. Treasure of treasures, it is quite impossible——

MARIE-LOUISE [*throwing herself upon her husband*]. Put your nose in the air this minute! Do as I tell you!

RICHARD. My glass! Isabelle, help! The cup!

ISABELLE [*saving the glass and cup*]. Marise, take care!

MARIE-LOUISE [*pushing* RICHARD'S *nose up as hard as she can*]. Will you keep that nose up?

RICHARD. Marise, you hurt! I declare you do! I heard it crack!

ISABELLE. She's crazy!

MARIE-LOUISE. Look at him, Isabelle! Isn't he a beauty that way? You are superb, my treasure! You look just like Coquelin!

RICHARD. Do stop!

MARIE-LOUISE. Not until they have all admired you! Raymond! Raymond! Come, look at Coquelin!

RAYMOND [*who has been conversing with* MONSIEUR ZAMBAULT *in another part of the room*]. Lovely!

ZAMBAULT [*to* FERNAND, *who is sitting apart from the others, reading*]. It is like a scene from *Le Jardin des Supplices*, isn't it?

FERNAND. Exactly, Monsieur. [*During the scene he gets up and goes into the conservatory, continuing his reading there.*]

MARIE-LOUISE [*regarding her handiwork*]. Heavens! How I should have loved you if you had looked like that!

RICHARD. Are you going to stop?

MARIE-LOUISE [*almost sitting on top of her husband and kissing him*]. Swear, old Ricky! Swear, my beauty!

ISABELLE. Aren't they perfectly fearful? My dears, really, before Monsieur Zambault——

MARIE-LOUISE [*letting go*]. Oh! I forgot! I'm

behaving very badly! Monsieur Zambault, I beg your pardon! I shall never do it again!

ZAMBAULT. But, my dear Madame, I am delighted! The sight of these little conjugal scenes amuses me immensely.

RAYMOND. Then you ought to live with Monsieur and Madame Voysin! You'd never suffer from lack of amusement, I promise you!

RICHARD. You see, Monsieur, what my life is like.

ISABELLE. They've been married nearly a year.

RICHARD. And the attack still continues.

MARIE-LOUISE. Attack? Attack? [*Pinching him.*]

RICHARD. Better say, the pinches continue!

ISABELLE. Aren't you ashamed? A poor man who has been working all day!

MARIE-LOUISE. Work? What, he?

RICHARD. I was at two board meetings to-day.

MARIE-LOUISE. No, my Boy, that won't do any longer! I know all about your board meetings.

RICHARD. What! You think I didn't——

MARIE-LOUISE. Oh! Yes! Yes! But I know what goes on at your board meetings!

RICHARD. Traitor! If you dare to repeat a single word——

MARIE-LOUISE. Guess, Raymond, how the old things pass their time!

RAYMOND. I'm anxious to know——

RICHARD. Old things, indeed! Suppose you tell!

MARIE-LOUISE. My dear, the venerable directors employ their time telling stories about little ladies!

RICHARD. It's not so!

MARIE-LOUISE. Swear!

RICHARD. I swear!

MARIE-LOUISE. On what?

RICHARD. Oh, on anything at all—on my honor!

MARIE-LOUISE. The fibber! And he told me himself!

RICHARD. Some one did bring up, one day, the story of Mme. Berodini——

MARIE-LOUISE. Well?

RICHARD. But she is a great lady, a huge lady, a dragon!

MARIE-LOUISE. A camel!

RICHARD. Yes.

RAYMOND. So, Monsieur Richard, when I send you to represent me at board meetings, instead of defending my interests, instead of confining your attention to Brazil, to Rio, to coffee plantations, you——

RICHARD [*to his wife*]. Delightful! Now see where you've landed me! You laugh, do you? Suppose Raymond were to dismiss me and employ another agent, where would the money come from?

MARIE-LOUISE. Dear Boy, I'd give you love instead!

RICHARD. And Paquin, you'd give him love, too?

MARIE-LOUISE. Wretch! I hardly ever go to Paquin now! I get all my things at little Aline's.

RICHARD. Little Aline, indeed! Well, little Aline knows how to make a big bill!

MARIE-LOUISE. Wretch! Pig!

RICHARD. And as for Mme. Breton, where you get your lingerie, I had a bill from her this morning——

MARIE-LOUISE. And?

RICHARD. And it seemed to me rather reasonable——

MARIE-LOUISE. Ah! You ought to go down on your knees to me. I skimp and scrape and go to all the bargain sales and accomplish wonders, don't I, Isabelle?

ISABELLE. Indeed she does, Richard! Your wife is a marvel, always beautifully dressed, chic and charming, and yet she spends hardly anything.

RAYMOND [*to* ISABELLE]. An example for you to follow!

ISABELLE. I'm too lazy and it's too much bother. Besides, I'm always afraid to bargain.

MARIE-LOUISE. Why should any one bargain who has an income of three hundred thousand francs, a château, a house in town, a yacht, four automobiles, all those plantations at Montefaccio——

RAYMOND. Bravo! Thanks! Go on, persuade Isabelle to spend some more money! She needs encouragement in that direction!

MARIE-LOUISE. We, Ricky dear, are poor people! But never mind, when we are in the ditch for good, I'll get all my linen at the Samaritaine—yes, I'll even wear those coarse chemises—you know, that horrid kind made of material like wrapping-paper with red embroidery.

RAYMOND. I can't quite picture Marie-Louise in any such get-up.

MARIE-LOUISE. You're wrong, Raymond! No, you're not, you're right! I should be afraid to have my husband see me in such things, for fear he might run off with some woman who wore only charming laces.

RICHARD. What! I, my duckling?

MARIE-LOUISE. Oh! I know you! Some dyed, painted-up blonde! [*She kisses him.*]

ISABELLE. Idiots! They are absolutely crazy! [*Going to* MONSIEUR ZAMBAULT.] Will you have a cigar, Monsieur Zambault?

ZAMBAULT. Thank you, Madame, I've just smoked one.

ISABELLE. Well, smoke another!

RAYMOND. They're very mild.

ZAMBAULT. They're very good! Monsieur Lagardes, you have the best cigars, the most delicious champagne, the finest park, and the most charming château that I've ever had the privilege of visiting.

RICHARD [*quickly and in an undertone to* MARIE-LOUISE]. Soft soap!

MARIE-LOUISE [*ditto*]. Nobody is called "Zambault"!

RICHARD [*ditto*]. It isn't much of a name!

MARIE-LOUISE [*ditto*]. Where did Raymond get him?

RICHARD [*ditto*]. And what's he going to do with him?

MARIE-LOUISE [*ditto*]. We've had him on our hands a week now.

RICHARD [*ditto*]. He's going to-night.

MARIE-LOUISE [*ditto*]. How do you know?

RICHARD [*ditto*]. Don't make gestures—I don't know.

MARIE-LOUISE [*ditto*]. Then why did you say so?

RICHARD [*ditto*]. Because I love you!

MARIE-LOUISE [*ditto*]. How much do you love me?

RICHARD [*ditto*]. Much! Much! Much!

MARIE-LOUISE [*ditto*]. With your heart or with your senses?

RICHARD [*ditto*]. With my heart *and* with my senses.

MARIE-LOUISE [*ditto*]. We're not behaving very well.

RICHARD [*ditto*]. No, we're not. We'd better join the conversation. [*He gets up.*]

ZAMBAULT. You're going to stay in the country longer than usual this year.

RAYMOND. Well, in the auto, we can get to Paris in half an hour, and with such a September——

ISABELLE. It's half-past nine, and yet all the windows are open—it's so warm.

RICHARD [*pointedly*]. Why, yes, this afternoon I was positively suffering from the heat!

ISABELLE. Poor dear! I'm so sorry!

ZAMBAULT. And you've been here ever since May?

RAYMOND. Ever since.

ISABELLE. We've talked vaguely two or three times of Biarritz or Trouville.

RAYMOND. And even a cruise in the fiords.

RICHARD. By way of hunting trouble, what?

MARIE-LOUISE. But we've been so comfortable here——

ISABELLE. And our friends have been so kind, staying with us——

RAYMOND. That, thanks to them, we have passed another delightful summer.

MARIE-LOUISE. Richard and I have both of us passed many delightful summers, thanks to you two!

ISABELLE. Oh! Not at all, dear Marise! Every year it's your gaiety, your consideration that——

MARIE-LOUISE. On the contrary, Beauty, if you were not the most indulgent, the most thoughtful, the most adorable hostess in the world——

RICHARD. Monsieur Zambault, they don't know what they are talking about! There is only one person who makes life pleasant for the whole crowd, and that person is myself. Monsieur Zambault, suppose we finish our game of billiards?

RAYMOND. Ah! Yes! Our three-cornered match! Monsieur Zambault was getting the best of it!

ZAMBAULT. Oh! Only just a little.

RAYMOND [*calling*]. Fernand! Oh! Fernand!

FERNAND [*appearing at one of the doors of the conservatory, a book in his hand*]. Yes, father.

RAYMOND. Will you come and be umpire?

FERNAND. With pleasure.

RICHARD. In other words, you will mark the points and applaud the innumerable flukes your father is going to make.

MARIE-LOUISE. You don't have to come, Fernand, you know.

RICHARD. After you, Monsieur Zambault.

RAYMOND. If you'd rather stay and read——

FERNAND. Just as you say, father. I was going to finish this story, but——

RAYMOND. Finish it, my boy, finish it! And the next one, too, if you like! Maupassant! Always Maupassant! Don't tire your eyes.

FERNAND. Oh, no!

[*He goes back into the conservatory.*

RAYMOND. Ladies?

ISABELLE [*whom* MARIE-LOUISE *is holding back*]. We'll join you in a few moments.

[*The three men go out.*

MARIE-LOUISE [*still holding* ISABELLE'S *hands*].

Beauty, I want you to tell me all you know about this mysterious Monsieur Zambault.

ISABELLE. My dear, I don't know any more about him than you do.

MARIE-LOUISE. Haven't you asked Raymond about him?

ISABELLE. Yes, but he always says the same thing: "I used to have frequent business relations with Monsieur Zambault, but I lost sight of him for quite a while. He turned up, though, recently, with an interesting proposition, and I am looking into it at my leisure."

MARIE-LOUISE. Your husband has not said a word to mine about this scheme, and despite his horror of strangers he invites this Monsieur Zambault to the château and forces him upon us from morning till night. Doesn't that seem strange to you, Beauty?

ISABELLE. No. If I were curious it might, but I'm not the least bit. Oh! I'm not boasting about it, I only envy you!

MARIE-LOUISE. If Richard hid the least thing from me, I should beat him!

ISABELLE. Very well, Marie-Louise, I promise you to give Raymond a good thrashing this very evening.

MARIE-LOUISE. Isabelle, you're horrid! You're making fun of me! I'm furious with you! [*She throws herself into a chair.*]

ISABELLE. Then come and console yourself by admiring your Ricky, your demi-god!

MARIE-LOUISE [*pretending to sulk*]. No, I'm going to stay here.

ISABELLE. Oh!

MARIE-LOUISE. I have a headache, and the noise of the balls—— Besides, there's your Monsieur Zambault. One can't even kiss one's husband before him!

ISABELLE. That doesn't seem to worry you very much!

MARIE-LOUISE. Well, you're the hostess, after all, so I suppose you must go. I'm only a guest, so I'll stay here and read the paper.

[*Exit* ISABELLE. *As soon as she has disappeared,* FERNAND *comes to the door of the conservatory.*]

MARIE-LOUISE. Ah!

FERNAND. Did you find my letter?

MARIE-LOUISE. Yes, I've just been upstairs and found the note that you had the impudence to leave in the armchair this time, right in the middle

of the room. Suppose the chambermaid had seen it!

FERNAND. No danger! We were just coming out from dinner and the servants were all downstairs.

MARIE-LOUISE. Or my husband?

FERNAND. What reason would your husband have for climbing up to his room before he had had his coffee? And then, I knew you'd go up directly after me. You saw me make our little sign.

MARIE-LOUISE. Some day you'll get caught on that staircase!

FERNAND. That staircase leads as well to my father's room and Isabelle's boudoir——

MARIE-LOUISE. Where they know you never set foot. Now, listen, Fernand, this nonsense has gone on long enough!

FERNAND. But——

MARIE-LOUISE. I agreed to meet you here and I got rid of Isabelle, because I wanted to talk to you seriously myself. I've had enough of it!

FERNAND. But, listen——

MARIE-LOUISE. Listen yourself! You go up to our room at all sorts of times and conceal your burning declarations in all sorts of places, in my blotter, among my handkerchiefs, under my pillow! No,

that time you made a mistake! You put it under Richard's pillow, and how I did laugh!

FERNAND. I always tell you beforehand.

MARIE-LOUISE. Thanks! You don't want to get caught yourself! At the beginning I just thought it was fun, rather a bore, but fun. Now, I regret my indulgence. You know, I suppose, what becomes of your epistles? [*She imitates tearing up a letter.*]

FERNAND. Ah! That isn't fair, Marise, that isn't fair! You promised me that in any case——

MARIE-LOUISE. Now don't get excited! I didn't tear up your letters! One would think, to look at you, that your heart was breaking!

FERNAND. You've never spoken to me like this before!

MARIE-LOUISE. You should have minded what I said. I've scolded you kindly a hundred times. As soon as you take it into your head to write me a letter I have to go directly upstairs on your heels. I'm coming to the end of my excuses now and some one will begin to suspect something. Then I have to hide your letters here, there, and everywhere, in the pavilion, in the grove, in the bottom of a trunk, in an old tennis net, and goodness knows where! You keep

me busy! Look, here's the one you wrote just now! No! Keep it! I don't want it! And now do me the favor to go to the pavilion. You will find there, all arranged according to date, these tokens of affection. I insist on your taking them back this very evening.

FERNAND. Marise!

MARIE-LOUISE. This very evening! If you don't I shall feel that I have been released from my promise and to-morrow I shall destroy the whole lot, for I don't intend to have anybody else find them and read them. If my husband had any idea of your impertinence, he would box your ears for you.

FERNAND. Ah!

MARIE-LOUISE. He would, indeed!

FERNAND [*between his teeth*]. Just let him try.

MARIE-LOUISE. My dear boy, you can't expect to please me by putting on that expression of hatred every time Richard's name is mentioned!

FERNAND [*same business*]. I should like to see him try!

MARIE-LOUISE. Fernand, you displease me, rather, this very moment! You're not clever about it! Any enemy of Richard's, even if it is only a boy of nineteen, is an enemy of mine, too!

FERNAND. How unkind you are, Marise!

MARIE-LOUISE. I do not carry goodness of heart to the point of denying——

FERNAND. No! No! You are unkind and you are cruel! You amuse yourself by making me suffer!

MARIE-LOUISE. Ah, indeed! [*She starts to go.*]

FERNAND [*stopping her*]. Marise! Forgive me! Please forgive me! Have some pity. can't you?

MARIE-LOUISE. You don't inspire me with pity at all!

FERNAND. Yes, have pity on me! I lied! You are not unkind! Forgive me!

MARIE-LOUISE. Very well. Now put on your hat and take a walk around the garden and tear your absurd letters into tiny pieces! Go on!

FERNAND. No! I implore you! [*Softly.*] I am so unhappy!

MARIE-LOUISE. I don't see why you should be in the least unhappy.

FERNAND [*in a deep voice*]. So unhappy! So unhappy!

MARIE-LOUISE. You're spoiled to death. That's what's the matter with you.

FERNAND. So unhappy, Marise! And you laugh at me.

MARIE-LOUISE. I'm afraid it all does seem like a comedy! You have known me all your life and suddenly, this summer——

FERNAND. Oh! I swear to you—— You won't take me seriously because I'm only nineteen and because I don't mix with the others, and because I stand around without daring to speak to you, because even in my letters I hardly have the courage—— But believe me, I love you with a man's love, as only a man can love! Believe me! Believe me!

MARIE-LOUISE. Goosie!

FERNAND. Marise, in the evening when we all break up down here, when you go up to your room with your husband, and father with Isabelle, I watch you climb the stairs, I listen to your voices, the laughter, and I hear the doors opening and shutting up there—and then I go to my room and I feel—oh! I could never tell you—it is as if—it is something—despair, I think—yes, despair seizes me and stifles me. Ah! Marise! Marise!

MARIE-LOUISE. Silly! You've been reading too much, you're all excited——

FERNAND. It is as if nobody wanted me, as if I were abandoned, alone in the world!

MARIE-LOUISE. Alone in the world! What non-

sense! Just because your father has married a charming woman who adores you and whom you pout at—there's the whole story!

FERNAND. The old, old story!

MARIE-LOUISE. You're jealous of Isabelle.

FERNAND. I never even think of Isabelle! I hardly ever think of my father—Marise, I never think of anybody at all—except you!

MARIE-LOUISE. Fernand, hush! I beg of you! I cannot allow you——

FERNAND. Marise, I think only of you.

MARIE-LOUISE. Now you're making me unhappy. You'll oblige me to leave the house altogether!

FERNAND. I will follow you!

MARIE-LOUISE. Oh, don't be stupid! I am just your good friend. Let us talk. Let me see! [*Suddenly.*] Fernand, I saw you one afternoon with a very charming young lady—in an electric victoria, I think.

FERNAND. Pff!

MARIE-LOUISE [*gaily*]. Fernand! Fernand! Have you by any chance a little friend?

FERNAND. No.

MARIE-LOUISE [*she comes close to him and takes his arm*]. No? [*A pause.*] No? No?

FERNAND. Yes!

MARIE-LOUISE. You're not helping me a bit to talk. Come on, now, a really truly little friend?

FERNAND [*looking at her*]. Yes.

MARIE-LOUISE. Only one?

FERNAND [*sulkily*]. Two.

MARIE-LOUISE. Goodness gracious me! Lately?

FERNAND. Yes.

MARIE-LOUISE. Since the beginning of your grande passion?

FERNAND. Yes, one of them.

MARIE-LOUISE. You are frank, at least.

FERNAND. I don't lie.

MARIE-LOUISE. You're not very hard hit.

FERNAND. I love you, Marise!

MARIE-LOUISE. I am sure you think you do, but you'll soon get over it! Yes, my dear Fernand! Yes! From the moment that you retained enough presence of mind to pay court to one of those young persons——

FERNAND. I didn't pay court to her!

MARIE-LOUISE. Perhaps I don't use just the right word. From the time you asked her—you offered her a gift—money?

FERNAND. I haven't any money.

MARIE-LOUISE. Well, you appear to get along

all the same! She seems to like you, this young person—eh?

FERNAND. Yes.

MARIE-LOUISE. Mercy! What a sepulchral voice! You ought to be cheerful about it, it's very flattering.

FERNAND. I don't feel flattered at all. You've no right to make fun of me like this. Why do you pester me with all these questions?

MARIE-LOUISE. Why? Because I find your stories interesting, droll, and because one should always laugh at everything! So, go on, tell me! Tell me all about it! Don't be disagreeable! Number One, who was she?

FERNAND. She was a woman.

MARIE-LOUISE. I might have guessed that much for myself! What did she do?

FERNAND. Nothing. She went to the races.

MARIE-LOUISE. Well, that's some occupation, at any rate. And the second?

FERNAND. She was a friend of the other one.

MARIE-LOUISE. Did she go to the races, too?

FERNAND. Yes. And then she plays——

MARIE-LOUISE. At the races?

FERNAND. No, at one of the smaller theatres, the Théâtre de la Madeleine.

MARIE-LOUISE. An actress! Then, Fernand, I want you to fall very much in love with this charming actress! Tell me her name, and I'll show you how to——

FERNAND. Don't bother yourself. When I am alone with her I feel even more wretched still! So wretched, that I would do anything to get away from her!

MARIE-LOUISE. That is polite!

FERNAND. She notices it, too. One day she wrote on the tablecloth in a restaurant: "Your heart is somewhere else," and I didn't deny it.

MARIE-LOUISE. What did she say then?

FERNAND. She said: "I know how that is."

MARIE-LOUISE. Poor dear! Was it she that scratched you up like that?

FERNAND. No, I did it myself.

MARIE-LOUISE. How?

FERNAND. Well, if you must know, night before last I couldn't sleep, so I went out and walked in the park, along the ravine. I saw your windows all lighted up. It was three o'clock in the morning, and yet you still had a light. And that light which would not go out nearly made me shriek. I did not shriek, but I dug my nails into my flesh.

MARIE-LOUISE. You shall never see that light again, Fernand.

FERNAND. You will close the curtains? Thanks.

MARIE-LOUISE. What folly!

FERNAND. Marise, if I could only die—if I could only die for you!

MARIE-LOUISE [*in a very decided tone*]. Fernand! Fernand! I've had quite enough of this! I mean it! If you keep on this way I will really laugh at you. Now listen, I'm going to talk to you as if you were a man, and you are going to act like a man, a loyal and courageous one, I know. First of all, Fernand, I owe you an apology. Yes, I know I flirted with you, I admit it. But I'd no idea you were so in earnest. I'm not a vain woman and I simply didn't believe you. But all my little coquetries meant nothing, absolutely nothing! I never really gave you a serious thought. I've never given any man a serious thought. I've never even dreamed of letting any man kiss me, except my husband! It would be utterly impossible! Fernand, I'm mad about Richard! So I have to tell you right out, and be unkind, cruel! I'm even more mad about him than I seem to be. Fernand! Fernand! don't weep over it! My dear boy, please don't!

FERNAND [*recovering himself*]. I'm not weeping!

I really am not! Only—I must answer you—I have to explain——

MARIE-LOUISE. Explain? Well?

FERNAND [*breaking down*]. Yes, but not now.

MARIE-LOUISE. Pull yourself together! Why, in a few months, you'll wonder how you ever even——

FERNAND. Promise me one thing, will you? Since you have ordered me to do it, I'm going immediately to get the letters that are hidden in the pavilion and tear them up. You see, I obey you! Then I shall sit on the bench by the little lake and wait for you. Will you come?

MARIE-LOUISE. No, not this evening, Fernand.

FERNAND. You won't refuse to listen to me——

MARIE-LOUISE. Yes, I do refuse. Be reasonable, Fernand.

FERNAND. But I must see you if only for five minutes. What's the harm? Won't you come? A last talk together?

MARIE-LOUISE. No, I won't. That question is not to be opened again. What would be the use?

FERNAND. I implore you, Marise. I hear them laughing, they've finished the game. I'm going now, and I shall sit by the little lake and wait for you.

MARIE-LOUISE. You will wait in vain.

FERNAND. I shall wait an hour, two hours, as long as necessary.

MARIE-LOUISE. I shall not come!

FERNAND. Yes, Marise, come!

MARIE-LOUISE. I shall not come!

FERNAND. Au revoir, Marise, for a little while.

MARIE-LOUISE. No Fernand.

FERNAND [*without looking at her*]. Yes! Yes! In a little while! I'll wait for you! I'll wait for you!

[*He goes out.*

MARIE-LOUISE [*alone, very decidedly*]. No! No! No!

Enter RICHARD.

MARIE-LOUISE. Ricky!

RICHARD. Marise!

MARIE-LOUISE. Match finished?

RICHARD. Finished. Laurels to Zambault, the queer bird. Why didn't you come in?

MARIE-LOUISE. Couldn't. Busy talking to Fernand. Give kissum.

RICHARD [*kissing her on the lips*]. Kissum as ordered.

MARIE-LOUISE. Not so tight! I love that waistcoat!

RICHARD. I'll have to look into this Fernand business. When one marries a charming young person like yourself, one has to be careful.

MARIE-LOUISE. Silly! Now listen, my little golden duck.

RICHARD. Yes, my little ruby ducklet.

MARIE-LOUISE. What?

RICHARD. Ducklet! Ducklet! Wife of duck!

MARIE-LOUISE. Ah, yes! Now, as I was going to say, I want to propose something. I'm very tired to-night. Couldn't we go up to bed early?

RICHARD. I was going to propose something, too.

MARIE-LOUISE. What?

RICHARD. I am very tired. If we went to bed late——

MARIE-LOUISE [*striking him playfully with her fists*]. Villain! Villain! Villain! Go back this instant to the billiard room and inform these people that your neuralgia, your fatal neuralgia——

RICHARD. Oh, no! It's your turn to have neuralgia to-night!

MARIE-LOUISE. I beg your pardon.

RICHARD. Think again!

MARIE-LOUISE. And if we should simply walk off and leave them?

RICHARD. Yes, if?

MARIE-LOUISE. Shall we?

RICHARD. Let's!

[*As they get to the doors* RAYMOND *appears at the billiard-room door, and, after a moment,* ISABELLE.]

RAYMOND. Oh! you young people—— [*Interrupting himself.*] Is Fernand there?

MARIE-LOUISE. No. He must have gone for a walk in the park.

RAYMOND. Good. You're not off to bed so soon, are you?

RICHARD. We were thinking of it, old man. Marie-Louise and I have both got a touch of neuralgia, both of us. Isn't it strange?

RAYMOND. Trying to outdo each other, I suppose.

MARIE-LOUISE [*suppliant*]. Please!

RAYMOND. I'm not keeping you just because I want your society. I really need you!

MARIE-LOUISE. I knew that.

RAYMOND. Indeed, you didn't know anything of the kind! I've something very urgent and very grave to talk to you about.

MARIE-LOUISE. Yes?

RAYMOND. Urgent and grave.

RICHARD. Isn't the old man serious about it?

RAYMOND. It's something which will interest you, and, furthermore, will flatter our little Marie-Louise.

MARIE-LOUISE. Flatter me?

RAYMOND. Exactly. If I am not mistaken, you thought Monsieur Zambault rather an enigmatical person——

MARIE-LOUISE. What! Enigmatical! What do you—— Isabelle, I'll make you pay up for that!

ISABELLE. But, my dear——

RAYMOND. Don't mind, my dear child, because I admire your perspicacity.

MARIE-LOUISE. I don't understand! Really, I don't understand!

RAYMOND. Very well. The business I had with Monsieur Zambault, the proposition I was looking into, was all make-believe! Monsieur Zambault never had anything to do with finance and I never had any dealings of the kind with him. What's more, a week ago I didn't even know him by name, and since we are talking about his name, I'll tell you

that Monsieur Zambault's name is not Monsieur Zambault.

MARIE-LOUISE [*taking her head in her hands*]. Stop! Stop! Stop!

RICHARD. I say, old man, are you sure you're not trying to make our heads ache worse?

RAYMOND. I give you my word of honor, I'm telling you only the simple truth.

RICHARD. Stranger than fiction.

ISABELLE. But why all this mystery?

RAYMOND. You'll know in a minute. Let us proceed in order. Richard, take a look out into the hall, if you will be so good. [*To* MARIE-LOUISE.] You are sure Fernand is out in the park?

MARIE-LOUISE. I think so. When he went, he said he had a bad headache and was going for a long walk.

RAYMOND. Good. Then I'll tell you in a word everything that has been going on. I've brought up my boy with certain principles, and from every point of view I'd rather—— However, you shall see. Sit down.

ISABELLE [*joking*]. Impressive, isn't he?

MARIE-LOUISE [*same business*]. I'm glad I've got a seat in the front row!

RICHARD [*bringing a chair, which he holds at arm's length. He sings, to an air from "Manon"*]:

'Tis no longer Zambault
Whose hand I now press
As in days long ago——

RAYMOND. La! La! Have you done? My children, I ask your silence and your attention. I must first beg your pardons all around. We are here altogether, four friends who have never had any secrets from each other. Marise and Isabelle grew up like sisters, Richard and I have been chums for twenty years. Our two houses have kept up the fraternal traditions, and yet I have had to hide something from Isabelle, from our little Marise, and from good old Richard. I hope you will forgive me when you know the circumstances.

RICHARD [*applauding on the back of a chair*]. Hear! Hear!

RAYMOND. Before I give the floor to Monsieur Zambault, that is, the ex-Monsieur Zambault——

ISABELLE. By the way, what's become of him?

RICHARD. He has disappeared as if by magic——

ISABELLE. Just as he appeared as if by magic!

RAYMOND. Never mind. He will reappear at the proper moment.

RICHARD. You're a great stage-manager!

RAYMOND. As I was saying: before giving the floor to Monsieur X, I must tell you in a few words the reasons for his being here at all. I begin. My good and charming wife has, as far as I know, only one small defect.

ISABELLE. Good! Now I'm going to catch it!

RAYMOND. My dear, amongst ourselves, and now that Fernand is out of the way, I'm obliged to state that you are most fearfully extravagant!

ISABELLE. So?

RAYMOND. However, far from any intention of blaming you, I am only too glad that Brazil produces good coffee and that our income allows you now and then to throw a little money out of the window. But I must say that since we have been here in the château Isabelle has amazed me! She hasn't let a single week go by without giving me one or two good-sized cheques to cash for her. Finally I spoke to her about it. Result: a fuss, an upheaval. Isabelle was furious at not being in the right, and I was given the cold shoulder. When, all of a sudden, anger lending her inspiration, the thought struck her that nothing

would have been easier than for a thief to have stolen money from her.

MARIE-LOUISE. Oh!

RAYMOND. When I cash a cheque for Isabelle, I generally bring it to her in gold pieces, one or two large notes, and the rest in small notes. Isabelle throws it all pell-mell, gold and paper together, into a drawer in her boudoir. [*To* RICHARD *and* MARIE-LOUISE, *indicating the upper story.*] I mean the little boudoir between your rooms and ours.

MARIE-LOUISE. What, you put such sums just in a——

RAYMOND. Heavens! All our servants have been with us for years. We have every confidence——

RICHARD. I should do the same thing, if I had a château!

RAYMOND. With this difference, that you would know how much you had.

RICHARD. Alas, yes!

RAYMOND. And Isabelle never has the remotest idea about her money.

ISABELLE. Now, Raymond, I——

RAYMOND. My dearest child, I must tell the facts of the case——

ISABELLE. Oh! Of course!

RAYMOND. Indeed, Isabelle at least always did lock the drawers and conceal the key in some unfindable place, but the drawer is in a Louis Seize secretary, a real old one, and the lock seems to be worn out. In short, Isabelle, a prey to evil presentiment, decided to make certain, so she added up the amount that was in the drawer, wrote it down, and waited. Her plan succeeded brilliantly. The next day eight hundred francs was missing.

MARIE-LOUISE. No!

ISABELLE. Yes.

RICHARD. Fancy that! But who on earth?

RAYMOND. "That is the question."

MARIE-LOUISE. Do you suspect anybody? *

ISABELLE [*with a gesture of ignorance*]. For my part——

RICHARD. I've never liked that little valet, Justin!

RAYMOND. My friends——

MARIE-LOUISE. Ricky, you're wrong! You oughtn't to accuse anybody without——

ISABELLE. And besides, little Justin never goes into that part of the château——

RAYMOND. My dear people——

*This and the following seven speeches almost at the same time in a quick mix-up.

MARIE-LOUISE. Besides, he isn't a vicious-looking person.

RICHARD. I think he is very sly.

RAYMOND. My friends, we must not anticipate! Let me go on. My wife told me the good news and we spent the evening counting up what had disappeared in the past three months. We found that at the very least it came to twenty thousand francs.

MARIE-LOUISE. Twenty thousand francs!

RAYMOND. The bottom figure.

RICHARD. And you never told us a thing about it——

RAYMOND. Just wait. The next day, when I got downstairs, you had gone to Paris. I was to meet you at the office in the afternoon, and I intended to tell you then and ask your advice, so I begged Isabelle to say nothing for a while to Marie-Louise or Fernand, who are both so impressionable. Well, I went into Paris. Before being taken to the office, I went to the London and Continental Bank and there I found our friend Freeman in a state of wild jubilation. As soon as I got inside the door, he said to me: "We've just caught one of our employees who has been making enormous thefts."

RICHARD. Paddington!

RAYMOND. Paddington. [*To the women.*] This rogue had devised the most marvelous, the most prodigious system. The directors were in despair when somebody told them about a certain Monsieur Gondoin. They installed Monsieur Gondoin, and after a remarkably short delay this man of genius had Paddington discovered and locked up. [*To* RICHARD.] You didn't know all that, did you?

RICHARD. Who is this Gondoin, a policeman?

RAYMOND. Will you keep quiet! A policeman indeed! You all know Monsieur Gondoin! [*A pause.*] Monsieur Gondoin is—— [*He stops.*]

RICHARD. Zambault?

RAYMOND. Precisely! Or, rather, Zambault is Gondoin.

MARIE-LOUISE. Ah! Good! Very good!

ISABELLE. Well, upon my word!

MARIE-LOUISE. What do you think of that?

RAYMOND. Monsieur Gondoin is a retired police magistrate who created for himself a new profession, that of magistrate-at-large. I made his acquaintance then and there in the private office of the London and Continental Bank, and I said to him: "Monsieur, I

have something for you to do. It would probably seem very small to you, but it is very important to me. Up to this time my wife and I have had every confidence in our servants. The idea that henceforward we shall have to be on the lookout, to be suspicious, to lock up everything, is a nightmare. Besides, in our house in Paris we have collections, of one kind or another, that are very valuable, etc." Monsieur Gondoin listened to my troubles and said very simply: "The investigation will not take long. In a week I shall be able to tell you who the thief is." Well and good. "During this week," he went on, "I must stay at your château." Naturally. "I shall bring my valet with me." Of course. "And I must pass for a guest." Again, of course. I must tell—— "No! No! You must not tell any one!" What, not my wife, my son, and my two most intimate friends? "Not a soul! Everybody, without exception, must think that I am merely a guest in the house for a week. You must ask Madame Lagardes to use your safe in future and to forget all about the theft. In that way," Monsieur Gondoin concluded, "you must preserve my incognito or I shall have to decline your offer." At first I was averse from doing it. The idea of an investigation of the sort, going on under

my own roof without your knowing about it, seemed beastly.

RICHARD. I can understand that. A man with your scruples.

RAYMOND. But I hoped to be able to tell you at the end of the week all about the crime, the criminal, and the punishment at the same time, and——

RICHARD. And so you went ahead.

RAYMOND. I went ahead.

RICHARD. I approve.

ISABELLE. So do I!

MARIE-LOUISE. So do I!

RAYMOND. Your absolution touches me all the more, because, since the arrival of the magistrate-at-large, I have been in the depths of remorse. Gondoin has played his part mercilessly. Only this evening, after our game of billiards, while you were all talking together, he took me aside, and spoke these magic words: "The inquiry is over. I asked for a week, but six days have been enough. In half an hour I will tell you who the culprit is," and with that he disappeared. My dear friends, the half-hour is now nearly over.

ISABELLE. My heart is pounding with excitement. How do you feel, Marise?

MARIE-LOUISE. I? I think it's great fun!

RICHARD. It's rough on Raymond!

MARIE-LOUISE. Oh! Raymond knows perfectly well that——

RAYMOND. Come, now!

ISABELLE. I'm so afraid it was my maid!

RICHARD. What! Thérèse, who adores you so!

RAYMOND. We must wait and see.

RICHARD. I am sure it's not Thérèse nor Blanche either!

ISABELLE. Or Jerome, or old Maria?

MARIE-LOUISE. Oh! Never old Maria, after sixty-five years of honorable service!

RICHARD. I am still inclined to think it was little Justin.

ISABELLE. Jerome is rather a queer fellow.

RAYMOND. Queer?

ISABELLE. Silent.

RAYMOND. If he weren't silent, I'd kick him out of the house.

ISABELLE. Naturally you stand up for your own valet.

RAYMOND. Ah! Now if we begin to get personal!

RICHARD [*to* RAYMOND]. What was this delay of

half an hour for? He arranges his effects very well, this Monsieur Gondoin of yours.

RAYMOND. Oh, no! You're mistaken! He isn't at all the sort of man to play to the gallery. He doesn't do anything without a reason. However——

Enter GONDOIN.

RICHARD. Monsieur Gondoin, I salute you!

ISABELLE. Good evening, Monsieur Gondoin.

MARIE-LOUISE. Monsieur Gondoin, I am very happy——

GONDOIN. Pardon me, but I don't understand.

RAYMOND. It's all right, Monsieur Gondoin. I've just been telling Madame Lagardes and our friends here all about the business.

ISABELLE. And we are breathless to hear more!

GONDOIN. Still, I don't understand.

RAYMOND. Monsieur Gondoin, you are a rare joker, but we are all consumed with impatience, and——

GONDOIN. Monsieur, I do not understand.

RICHARD. The name! Who is it?

[GONDOIN *makes a gesture.*]

RAYMOND. Come! Come! Monsieur Gondoin,

I have kept my part of our agreement. I said nothing until the end of your inquiry. You have just told me that it is finished, and as I owe a certain reparation to my friends for not treating them frankly in the matter, I want them to be the first——

ISABELLE. Yes, Monsieur Gondoin, do be nice!

GONDOIN. Monsieur, I have the honor to ask you for a private interview. In my own opinion, it ought to be private——

ISABELLE. You're not going to leave us out!

RAYMOND. Now really, my dear sir——

RICHARD [*to* RAYMOND]. Monsieur Gondoin may have his reasons for preferring to——

GONDOIN. Exactly.

RAYMOND. But what reasons?

GONDOIN. Monsieur, spare me five minutes, and—

RAYMOND [*shortly*]. No. We are all friends here. I can guarantee the discretion of everybody and I'm sure——

GONDOIN. I never doubted that discretion for an instant.

RAYMOND. Well, then? [*A pause.*] The robber can hardly get away from you now, can he? And the fact of pronouncing his name before my guests won't——

RICHARD [*laughing*]. Unless you accuse one of us!

GONDOIN [*offended*]. Monsieur—— [*He stops. A pause.*]

RAYMOND [*with decision*]. Come, Monsieur Gondoin, I'm getting tired of this. I insist on your speaking!

GONDOIN. Very well! I am acting in this affair entirely in your interests. Since you take no account of my obvious opposition——

RAYMOND [*dryly*]. No account.

GONDOIN. I bow to your wishes. Only it is not enough that you merely insist. You demand——

RAYMOND. I do.

GONDOIN. You demand that I disclose publicly all that my investigation has brought to light?

RAYMOND. Yes.

GONDOIN. Very well, Monsieur. The person who took the twenty thousand francs out of the secretary drawer is Monsieur Fernand Lagardes, your son.

RAYMOND [*starting up, about to spring upon* GONDOIN]. You lie!

[*A moment of confusion follows.* RICHARD *and* ISABELLE *hold back* RAYMOND.]

RICHARD. Raymond!

GONDOIN. You surprise me, Monsieur Lagardes. You have no right to——

RAYMOND. I repeat, you——

ISABELLE. Raymond! Raymond! I beg of you—— [*To* GONDOIN.] My husband loves his son very devotedly, Monsieur, and we know that Fernand—that such a suspicion is impossible!

RICHARD. Absolutely impossible!

MARIE-LOUISE. You must be wrong, Monsieur Gondoin.

GONDOIN. Ladies, you all saw that I tried my best to spare Monsieur Lagardes——

RAYMOND. Oh! It is not of the slighest importance to me that you have accused the boy, that you have impeached his integrity, his loyalty, before my friends here. You will soon see that everybody will laugh at you.

GONDOIN. In that case, I had better withdraw at once.

RAYMOND. By no means! I have no idea of letting you go before I convince you that——

GONDOIN. Monsieur Lagardes, I have carried out conscientiously the inquiry which you put into my hands. I intended to make you a faithful report and

furnish you with documents which would give you ample proof. But I have no intention of submitting to treatment of this sort nor of allowing myself to be spoken to in such a manner.

ISABELLE. My dear, do calm yourself!

RICHARD. Yes, do. Let us talk the thing out quietly, and Monsieur Gondoin will be the first, I am sure, to see that he is mistaken. [*A pause.*] Raymond, old man!

RAYMOND. You are right! Monsieur Gondoin, I am sorry I spoke as I did. I am not usually like that. Will you accept my apology and give us further explanation?

GONDOIN. I ask nothing better, Monsieur, than to forget what you said. And now, since you are master of yourself, I am ready to give you the evidence upon which I base my conviction.

RAYMOND. I undertake beforehand to disprove it completely.

GONDOIN. As you please. I must ask you, to begin with, not to lose sight of the fact that the part of the château where your apartments and those of Monsieur and Madame Voysin are situated is not exactly suited for secret expeditions. On this side, the left side, the château overlooks a sort of ravine,

a rocky precipice, in fact. Furthermore, the staircase inside is in full view of——

RAYMOND. Yes, yes! I understand all that. I can see that nobody from the outside could very well get into the boudoir without our knowing it. That is what you mean to make plain, isn't it?

GONDOIN. Monsieur, your impatience is easily understood, but I assure you I am only giving you necessary details. [*He has taken from his portfolio a paper which he consults from time to time.*] Having made that point, I go on to more important matters. [*To* RAYMOND.] In order to proceed more rapidly, I should be very much obliged if you would answer me certain questions. First and foremost: Have you noticed whether or not Monsieur Fernand has developed rather a gloomy disposition during the last three or four years?

RAYMOND. Fernand has always been rather reserved or, I might say, distant.

GONDOIN. I don't mean in his childhood. What I want to know is if his character has not altered materially since your marriage?

RAYMOND. Really, I don't see what——

GONDOIN. Please believe me, Monsieur, I am not merely talking. I quite realize how cruelly——

ISABELLE. It is true, Monsieur Gondoin. Fernand, who adores his father, was not at all pleased with our marriage at first. But during the last winter we have noticed a decided change. [*To* RAYMOND.] Haven't we? We were so delighted to see that the boy was even gay and——

GONDOIN. Ah! You are sure it was last winter?

ISABELLE. Yes.

GONDOIN. And since you have been at the château this summer, that gaiety has disappeared. Monsieur Fernand has become as taciturn as before. He is more than taciturn, he is almost shy.

RAYMOND. Shy!

GONDOIN. He seldom addresses a remark to any one, he keeps almost entirely to himself, and seems a prey to preoccupations——

RAYMOND. We attributed that to neurasthenia.

GONDOIN. Exactly! You were disturbed at the change. [RAYMOND *makes a gesture.*] You did notice it?

RAYMOND [*after a pause, irritated*]. Yes.

GONDOIN. Now, another thing: How much do you give your son every month for pocket money?

RAYMOND. Three hundred francs. He has no expenses, and I think that at nineteen——

GONDOIN. Of course. He has nothing to complain of. Did you know that your son was carrying on an affair with a woman?

RAYMOND. An affair?

GONDOIN. With a woman of the demi-monde, good-looking, well-known, in a word, expensive.

RAYMOND. What do you mean?

GONDOIN. The young person is called Mademoiselle Jessie Arnold. She lives in a small house, number nine, rue de Prony. She has been acting recently, though with no great success, in minor parts at the Théâtre de la Madeleine.

RAYMOND. Nonsense! My son knows no such person!

GONDOIN. My investigation leaves no room for doubt. You can easily verify——

RAYMOND. No such person!

RICHARD. Even if he did! This boy and the woman have probably fallen in love with one another! That doesn't prove anything! Let us get on!

GONDOIN [*quietly*]. By all means. Did you know, Monsieur, that your son frequents the races?

RAYMOND. My son goes Thursdays and Sundays to the races with my permission. He enjoys the sport.

GONDOIN. Good. Did you know that he bets?

RAYMOND. He sometimes puts up ten francs.

GONDOIN. Last Thursday he twice bet a thousand francs.

RAYMOND. That, I deny!

GONDOIN [*referring to his papers*]. He put a thousand francs in a *pari mutuel* on the fourth race, bureau A-2, on a horse named Cashmere, which was beaten.

RAYMOND. It is false!

GONDOIN. And a thousand francs on the last race, bureau A-1, on a horse named Easy Winner, which was also beaten.

RAYMOND. I deny it! I deny it!

GONDOIN. Monsieur, one of my men followed Monsieur Fernand around, step by step.

RAYMOND. I know all about these "shadowings"!

GONDOIN. I can answer for the man as for myself.

RICHARD. One moment. Your man did not mention any of the other races?

GONDOIN. Only one, which did not amount to anything. Twenty francs on the second race on a horse that never had a chance of winning.

RICHARD. Good! It's perfectly clear! When

Fernand put up the twenty francs he was playing his own money, and when he placed the thousand francs he was doing it for somebody else, a woman perhaps, or some rich young man who may have been with him.

RAYMOND. That's quite possible.

GONDOIN. Gentlemen, I am not dealing with possibilities, but with facts!

RAYMOND. Nevertheless, I prefer to believe that it is not on such vague——

GONDOIN. Of course I have so far only sketched in a sort of background. Now one more question, the most important of all. What motive would your son have in going up into that part of the château which you call the boudoir story?

RAYMOND. None whatever. And he never does go up there! He is probably held back by some sentiment or other. I share the bedroom with my wife, and—— Anyhow, we have never seen Fernand up there, not once!

GONDOIN. It is certain, nevertheless, that Monsieur Fernand has visited those rooms quite a number of times.

RAYMOND. Impossible, Monsieur Gondoin, quite impossible! Why, for many reasons——

GONDOIN. Monsieur Fernand has been up in that story a number of times.

RAYMOND. How do you know?

GONDOIN. And he has chosen times when he was least apt to be seen.

RAYMOND [*louder*]. How do you know?

GONDOIN. I could very easily give you my source of information, but do not let us look ahead too fast. Everything seems to point to the fact that some one here present can confirm what I have said.

RICHARD. As far as I am concerned, I give you my word of honor that——

GONDOIN. I do not mean you, Monsieur. [*Turning toward* ISABELLE.] Madame?

ISABELLE. Why—— [*A pause.*]

RAYMOND. Speak! Speak!

GONDOIN. You will be fulfilling a duty, Madame. Have you ever happened to meet Monsieur Fernand in the boudoir?

ISABELLE. Never in the boudoir!

GONDOIN. Or on the staircase leading up to the boudoir? [*A pause.*]

RAYMOND [*nervously*]. Isabelle, do speak out!

ISABELLE. It seems to me that I have passed Fernand on the stairs. Yes.

GONDOIN. Often?

ISABELLE. Four or five times.

GONDOIN. No more than that?

ISABELLE. Well, perhaps five or six times.

GONDOIN. Or ten or twelve times.

ISABELLE. I really can't remember exactly.

RAYMOND. And you never asked him why he was there?

ISABELLE. You know very well on what terms——

RAYMOND. But you must have been surprised to see him there, so near your room?

ISABELLE. For a moment! And yet——

RAYMOND. And when you discovered the thefts, didn't these meetings occur to you?

ISABELLE. Not for an instant! Such a thought never crossed my mind! Fernand!

RAYMOND. Extraordinary!

GONDOIN [*to* MARIE-LOUISE]. And you, Madame, you heard my question, may I beg you——

MARIE-LOUISE. Now, listen, Monsieur——

RAYMOND [*more and more nervous*]. My dear, you must answer!

MARIE-LOUISE. Well, then, yes, I have seen Fernand there, but not often!

GONDOIN. In the boudoir or on the staircase?

MARIE-LOUISE. I really can't remember, I assure you! It may have been—— On the staircase, I believe——

RAYMOND. And you were not surprised either?

MARIE-LOUISE. Not for an instant. Why should I have been?

GONDOIN. All this is just as I expected. The ladies often go to their rooms after dinner to put on some powder or fix their hair. And thus the meetings took place!

RAYMOND. Nevertheless, I place no faith in coincidences even in such striking coincidences which, I admit, would be troublesome for you—for a stranger. But my son will be able to explain it all in a word! If you have nothing more exact——

GONDOIN. Monsieur, you forget that I have made a formal accusation, therefore I have proof, striking, irrefutable proof! Here it is:

[*At this moment a butler and second-man enter. The second-man carries glasses of orangeade and syrup on a tray, which he sets down. Then the two servants take away the coffee cups, liqueur flasks, etc.* GONDOIN *is silent. The other characters remain in their places, ill at*

ease, waiting for the servants to retire. When they have left and the door is shut, GONDOIN *continues.*]*

Here is the proof! I asked Monsieur Lagardes for two thousand francs. This morning I changed the two notes into notes of fifty and a hundred francs, all of which I marked in the same manner. When luncheon was hardly over, I withdrew, and running upstairs I hid the whole sum in the famous drawer the key of which Monsieur Lagardes had given me. From that moment I never let Monsieur Fernand out of my sight, but he did not go near the left wing of the château the whole afternoon. Dinner-time came. After dinner, the same thing. As soon as we rose from the table I disappeared. You probably noticed it. I went to the boudoir and opened the drawer. Not a centime was missing. I was accompanied by my valet, who, as you may suppose, is not a real valet. I made him hide on the staircase behind some plants which concealed him completely, and I came back directly to the drawing-room. Monsieur Fernand was reading *Le Temps*, this very copy. In a moment he put down the paper, got up, went out, and moving quickly along the gallery reached the foot of the stair-

*The entry of the servants may be left out at performance.

case, and having looked quickly all around, went upstairs on tiptoe.

MARIE-LOUISE. But, Monsieur, I went up myself——

GONDOIN. Madame, if you please, one moment! At the end of a few minutes Monsieur Fernand came down, passed my invisible sentinel and, having cast the same cautious glances around on all sides, again reappeared in our midst. I spoke to him casually: "I'll wager you've been out to the kennels," I said, "to see the new fox-terrier puppies!" and he replied, forcing himself for the first time to smile, "Yes, I have." Then Madame Voysin disappeared. She, too, went along the passage, up the staircase, and into her room, singing an air from "Tosca," your favorite air, Madame. My man heard a door shut and then the sound of something falling——

MARIE-LOUISE. Yes, I had broken my nice atomizer. I went up to——

GONDOIN [*interrupting*]. If you please! The servants brought the coffee, and almost at the same moment Madame Voysin returned. She was wearing that lace scarf which she had put on in her room. You see, Madame, I neglect nothing. The coffee drunk and the cigars smoked, we went into the bil-

liard-room. But before starting our match, I again withdrew. As I passed my assistant, he whispered quickly the names of the only two persons who had been up there. I undertook my third visit; for the third time I hurriedly opened the drawer and counted the money. Four hundred and fifty francs had been stolen! I rejoined the company in the billiard-room, and as the last shot was made, I told Monsieur Lagardes that my investigation was completed. [*Turning to* RAYMOND.] In short, Monsieur, at nine o'clock the drawer contained two thousand francs. At ten minutes after ten it held but fifteen hundred and fifty. In the interval three persons, and only three, had been in that boudoir, and one of the three had committed the theft. Those three persons are Madame Voysin, Monsieur Fernand, and myself. I am out of the question, and Madame Voysin may also be supposed to be out of it, although she was not spared any more than the others. You are now as well informed as I, Monsieur, concerning the peculiarities of your son's character, his conduct, his suspicious expenses, and his unusual excursions. That is all. I have finished. If you wish to make any further inquiries, I am still at your service. [*He moves away a few steps. A pause.*]

RAYMOND. Well? [*Another pause.*] Well, you have all changed your opinion?

RICHARD. Old man! This is not the time for protestations. We are all your friends. I don't believe Fernand is guilty, because I should never condemn any man without first hearing his side. But I must confess that although I was absolutely incredulous at the beginning of Monsieur Gondoin's explanations, I now feel—well, I do feel impressed.

ISABELLE [*she comes over to* RAYMOND, *who has sat down, and passing her arm about his neck, kisses him*]. Raymond, my dear! [*A pause.*]

RAYMOND [*who has taken* ISABELLE'S *hand*]. What's to be done?

RICHARD. Let Fernand know as soon as possible what he is accused of.

RAYMOND. Naturally! [*A pause.*] But who will undertake to do it?

RICHARD. You must.

RAYMOND. Not under any consideration!

RICHARD. But——

RAYMOND. Not under any consideration! I simply couldn't find the words to do it. Fernand respects me as his father, and I love him as my son. I

have always looked upon him as a truthful child and an honest man of good character, and I shall continue to do so in spite of the fact that appearances are against him.

RICHARD. All the more reason for——

RAYMOND. Impossible! Fernand knows how I feel! It would be a mortification I could never endure! Impossible! And, besides, there isn't any question of—— I couldn't get the words out of my mouth!

RICHARD. I am sorry.

RAYMOND. But you, Richard.

RICHARD [*softly*]. Ah! No!

RAYMOND. Your position is entirely different. As a good comrade, an elder brother, you could——

RICHARD. No, Raymond!

RAYMOND. You refuse?

RICHARD. I refuse.

RAYMOND. Without any reason?

RICHARD. No, for a very good reason. Since the beginning of his misanthropy, his neurasthenia, Fernand has been treating me with coldness, with hostility even——

RAYMOND. Oh!

RICHARD. It has been very marked.

RAYMOND. You only imagine it!

RICHARD. I am not the only person who has noticed it. Ask Isabelle and Marie-Louise.

MARIE-LOUISE. It's true.

RAYMOND. All that may be so, but, nevertheless, if I broached the subject it would come to nothing.

ISABELLE. I would offer to do it, only——

MARIE-LOUISE [*quickly*]. Suppose I speak to Fernand? We have been such good chums.

RAYMOND. What would you say to him, Marise?

MARIE-LOUISE. I'd tell him the truth.

RAYMOND. Point blank? Hush! Some one is walking outside on the gravel!

[*All listen.*]

MARIE-LOUISE [*who is already at the door of the conservatory*]. No, there's nobody there! Shall I go?

RAYMOND. You'll be very careful, won't you?

MARIE-LOUISE. Don't worry!

RICHARD. Remember how fond Fernand is of his father. Make use of that, tell him you think Raymond is trying to hide some terrible grief.

MARIE-LOUISE [*in the conservatory*]. Yes! Yes!

RAYMOND [*following her*]. Ask him if he has anything to reproach himself for.

RICHARD [*same business*]. If he is evasive, come back and we'll try to think of something else.

MARIE-LOUISE. Very well! [*She goes out quickly. Her voice is heard farther and farther away, calling: Fernand! Fernand!*]

RAYMOND. I hope she finds him! [*Taking out his watch. With surprise.*] Quarter to twelve! I wonder why Fernand has not come in?

ISABELLE. It's such a lovely night!

RAYMOND. But look at the time! We are usually in bed. It seems as though everything were in league——

RICHARD. He's probably lost sight of the time. I shouldn't be alarmed.

RAYMOND. Ah! the dear child! I have never doubted his affection. We have always been such friends and so frank with each other. When Isabelle and I married the friendship was clouded for a while, but the clouds have been passing away. Fernand was beginning to feel Isabelle's charm, her goodness. He was growing like his old self again, we were so happy. And now! No! No! No! [*A pause.*] But why the devil hasn't the boy come in?

ISABELLE. Raymond dear, you are exciting yourself unnecessarily.

RAYMOND. Come, Monsieur Gondoin, you who divine one's inmost thoughts, who can read souls——

GONDOIN. You flatter me, Monsieur.

RAYMOND. Can you explain my son's prolonged absence?

GONDOIN. It seems to me to be only one more eccentricity on the part of Monsieur Fernand. The young man is passing through some trying moments just now.

RAYMOND. Yes. [*A pause.*] Monsieur Gondoin, you see before you a father in torment.

GONDOIN. I feel for you, Monsieur.

RAYMOND. In your opinion, do you think Madame Voysin can do anything? Can she bring us back any comfort—or only——

GONDOIN. Or only protestations? No, Monsieur. As I was not consulted, I did not interfere, but I very much disapprove of the tactics adopted.

RICHARD. We never considered it as tactics.

ISABELLE. We only acted according to our consciences.

GONDOIN. You ask me for a prognosis. Very well. I think Monsieur Fernand will meet Madame

Voysin with an impassive attitude, an impenetrable countenance, and an icy reply.

RAYMOND. In other words, my son is a thoroughgoing rascal.

GONDOIN. Your son is a young, ardent being who is in love for the first time and who has chosen unwisely. He submits to an evil influence, but he submits completely.

RICHARD. What would you have advised us to do?

GONDOIN. To have let me carry on this inquiry to the very end. I should have asked only five minutes more, and I believe, I repeat that I believe, that in that time I, Gondoin, would have obtained a confession!

RICHARD. How would you have gone about it?

GONDOIN. Ah! by strong means!

RAYMOND. Cross-questioning! Violence!

GONDOIN. Not at all! I should simply have had a short conversation with your son, preferably before the four persons who have just been listening to me! But now the alarm has been given, and——

RICHARD. Here is Marie-Louise.

Enter MARIE-LOUISE.

ISABELLE. Ah!

RAYMOND. Speak!

MARIE-LOUISE [*out of breath*]. I couldn't find him. He isn't in the park.

RAYMOND. Are you sure?

MARIE-LOUISE. Yes, I've been down in the grove and I called and called! He must have gone up to his room! There's a light up there.

GONDOIN. Ah! So much the better!

RAYMOND. Without saying good-night to us!

GONDOIN. Monsieur Lagardes, since everything is just where it was, will you allow me to question your son and to do it in my own way?

RAYMOND. What do you think, Richard?

RICHARD. If I were you, I should consent. This present state of affairs is unendurable!

RAYMOND. Very well! I'll send for him! [*He goes to ring. At this moment* FERNAND *enters from the hall.*]

FERNAND. Good-night, everybody.

RAYMOND. Good-night, Fernand. [*A pause.*]

GONDOIN. Monsieur Fernand, you find solemn faces and sad hearts. Your family and your friends are shocked beyond expression.

FERNAND. At what?

GONDOIN. Let me first tell you the real reason for my being here at all. I was sent by the Attorney-General of the Republic.

FERNAND. By the Attorney-General?

GONDOIN. Yes. There has been a robbery in the château.

FERNAND. Here?

GONDOIN. Here. The thief got away with quite a large amount.

FERNAND [*in a surprised tone*]. Ah!

GONDOIN. I thought you might be able to help us. I have begun to suspect the butler.

FERNAND. Louis?

GONDOIN. Louis! Old Louis. I understand your feelings. The man has been in your family for thirty years.

FERNAND. But Louis would not steal!

GONDOIN. You think him incapable of dishonesty?

FERNAND. Absolutely incapable.

GONDOIN [*looking fixedly at* FERNAND]. And you would be willing to swear to that before a court?

FERNAND. I should.

GONDOIN. Then tell me who is the thief.

FERNAND. I don't know! Why should you imagine——

GONDOIN. You don't know who the thief is?

FERNAND. The thief?

GONDOIN. Yes. You know who he is!

FERNAND. Are you joking?

GONDOIN. Do you know Mademoiselle Jessie Arnold?

FERNAND [*leaping up*]. Now see here, you! I forbid you——

GONDOIN. Don't get excited! Just tell us what you were doing upstairs there this evening, about quarter after nine.

FERNAND [*worried*]. Upstairs?

GONDOIN. In the story where Madame Lagardes's rooms are.

FERNAND [*lowering his voice*]. I was not up there.

GONDOIN. You were seen going up there at a quarter after nine!

FERNAND [*same business*]. It is a mistake. I was not up there!

GONDOIN. Besides that, you've been up there pretty frequently.

FERNAND [*very much worried*]. I have not! You are mistaken!

GONDOIN. You have never been in Madame Lagardes's boudoir?

FERNAND. Never!

GONDOIN. What? Look at me!

FERNAND [*hesitating*]. I do not remember. No, never!

GONDOIN. Look at me! You are the thief!

FERNAND [*feebly*]. I? You are mistaken, Monsieur, I have never stolen anything.

GONDOIN. It was you who took Madame Lagardes's money out of the secretary drawer!

FERNAND. I repeat——

GONDOIN. It is useless to deny it! You don't dare even to raise your eyes.

FERNAND [*looking* GONDOIN *straight in the face, but speaking without conviction*]. It is false! I did not steal the money.

RAYMOND. Fernand! Fernand! Can't you see that the very tone of your voice convicts you?

GONDOIN. Come on, my boy, own up!

FERNAND. No! I did not take the money!

RAYMOND. Show some indignation at least! Yell, if necessary!

GONDOIN. He will be sensible about it! He knows I've got him, that I saw him! Yes, I saw you! Own up, won't you, and don't prolong this situation that is so terrible for everybody. [*A pause.*]

RAYMOND. Well?

FERNAND. I should like to speak to you, father, by yourself.

RAYMOND. It is useless. Your shame is now public. [*He sits down, overcome.*]

GONDOIN. You admit it?

[FERNAND *makes an affirmative sign.*]

How did you know that Madame Lagardes kept her money in that drawer?

FERNAND [*after some hesitation*]. Why, I—I knew it.

GONDOIN. How did you get the drawer open?

FERNAND. I tried several keys, but none of them worked. Then I slipped the blade of my penknife into the groove and pushed down the lock.

GONDOIN. Exactly. [*Turning to the others with a professional smile.*] I told you that nearly all the drawers in the house could be opened that way! And to shut it?

FERNAND. I used a key—the key of the wardrobe. It wouldn't open the lock, but it would shut it.

GONDOIN. How much did you take altogether?

FERNAND. Twenty-one thousand five hundred francs.

GONDOIN. Where did you hide the four hundred and fifty francs you got just now?

FERNAND. I didn't hide them. Here they are!

GONDOIN [*examining the notes*]. Yes, these are the ones. Here are the marks. [*To* RAYMOND.] Monsieur——

RAYMOND [*to* FERNAND]. Go to your room and wait for me! I'll come and talk to you directly!

FERNAND. Very well, father! [*Exit.*

RICHARD [*to* RAYMOND]. Poor old man! Poor old fellow!

RAYMOND. My dear friends, do you mind leaving me? I can't talk any more! I want to be alone with my wife! It is a cruel blow, and I must be alone to think things out.

[*The curtain falls while the characters, excepting* RAYMOND *and* ISABELLE, *go out in silence.*]

ACT II

ACT II

A bedroom in the château, daintily and cheerfully furnished. A door into the hall and one into a dressing-room. When the curtain rises the stage is almost completely dark, the only light coming through the open window from outside. MARIE-LOUISE *and* RICHARD *enter arm in arm. They are dressed as in the previous act except that* RICHARD *wears a straw hat, which he takes off immediately on entering.* MARIE-LOUISE *has a light mantle thrown over her shoulders, and the fichu mentioned in the last act on her head. As they enter* RICHARD *switches on the electricity. The room is lighted with the soft glow of tastefully shaded lamps. On the bed at the back are* MARIE-LOUISE'S *lace nightgown and* RICHARD'S *pajamas.*

MARIE-LOUISE. Ouf! Ricky dear, I couldn't have gone another step. Goodness! how tired I am!

RICHARD. As tired as all that after half an hour's walk around the lawn?

MARIE-LOUISE. But the way you galloped! I trotted along at your side without saying anything, but you took steps like that!

RICHARD. This blessed business has upset me completely.

MARIE-LOUISE. I can see that.

RICHARD [*during the next few speeches he takes off his dinner coat and waistcoat and puts on a dressing-gown*]. My word! you don't seem to be troubled in the least! Women are certainly extraordinary. They live in an atmosphere of catastrophe as if it were their natural element.

MARIE-LOUISE. Catastrophe! Oh! I think you're making too much of what happened!

RICHARD. I don't think so at all!

MARIE-LOUISE. I'm awfully sorry, of course, and surprised——

RICHARD. Surprised! I'm dumbfounded! Fernand! Who would ever have suspected Fernand?

MARIE-LOUISE. I must confess——

RICHARD. I was fond of the boy in spite of his sulky ways, but I liked him because he was the son of my best friend, yet my feelings did not blind me.

But I should have answered for his honesty as for my own, as for yours. The little wretch!

MARIE-LOUISE. Don't be hard on him.

RICHARD. I'm thinking of Raymond, poor old chap! You know that up to the very last moment he believed with all his might that his son was innocent. The boy's confession fell on his head like the blow of an axe. He was completely knocked out.

MARIE-LOUISE. It was terrible, wasn't it? I felt tears come into my eyes.

RICHARD. He certainly is to be pitied! Is there a light in their windows still?

MARIE-LOUISE [*looking out of the window*]. Oh, yes, the whole house is lighted up.

RICHARD. Raymond must be going to and fro like a shuttle between his room and Fernand's. Charming way to spend the night! And what a situation for Isabelle! Supposing I go and knock at their door and ask Raymond——

MARIE-LOUISE. Not under any consideration! Raymond told us quite plainly that he wanted to be alone with his wife.

RICHARD. True! In any case, it's very easy to understand that. I can see how an outsider would be in the way. He's on a hair-trigger to-night, poor

fellow! A fine, upright man like him! It's a shame!

MARIE-LOUISE. He'll get over it. Fernand is just a too lively youth who has done a foolish thing!

RICHARD. I shouldn't call it just a foolish thing; he has committed theft, a series of thefts!

MARIE-LOUISE. In three months' time you'll look back on this series of crimes as a mere youthful folly.

RICHARD. Never! I cannot see why you don't recognize how serious——

MARIE-LOUISE. Dear, it's now quarter after one in the morning. For three hours I've been looking on at the twistings and turnings of this drama! I have passed a rather disagreeable evening, like everybody else, so please let me have a more pleasant night at least! There's no use in our talking about it any more, or your holding your head in your hands——

RICHARD. I'm fond of my friends, Marise, and I can't think of anything else.

MARIE-LOUISE. Ricky! And your wife, you don't love her any more?

RICHARD [*tenderly*]. Little brute!

MARIE-LOUISE. Very well, take the little brute in your arms! I feel all tired out, all gone. I want to cry.

RICHARD. Oh! my dear little dear!

MARIE-LOUISE. Yes, I do! You've been so horrid to me.

RICHARD. What! I?

MARIE-LOUISE. Yes, you! You're so occupied in making grand gestures that you ignore me altogether!

RICHARD. I love you!

MARIE-LOUISE. Then, kiss! [*Stopping.*] Nicely, now! [*A long kiss on the lips, then:*]

RICHARD. I love you! I love you! I love you! [*He kisses her again. A long embrace. Then another kiss still longer. A pause.*]

MARIE-LOUISE. That was nice!

RICHARD. Yes?

MARIE-LOUISE. Yes. [*A pause.*] Very nice. [*With sudden fury.*] Oh! Oh! Oh!

RICHARD. What on earth is the matter, my dear child?

MARIE-LOUISE. It will be two o'clock when we get into bed, you'll be all excited and unable to sleep, and then you'll want to get up in the morning before everybody else in the world! To-morrow will be

Sunday, and we can stay in bed till all hours, and I promised myself a long night beside you, in your arms! It's horrid!

RICHARD. You promised yourself! Do you think about those things in the daytime?

MARIE-LOUISE. Yes, I do! I think about them all the time. Don't you?

RICHARD. Yes.

[*A pause. During the last speeches* MARIE-LOUISE *has taken a small card-case from the bosom of her gown and hidden it under some linen in the top drawer of the chest of drawers. She has locked the drawer and thrown the key into the drawer of the night-table.*]

What precious relic are you locking away with such care?

MARIE-LOUISE. If anybody should really ask you, tell them you don't know anything about it.

RICHARD. Then you expect to wear my photograph next your heart for the rest of your natural existence?

MARIE-LOUISE. For the rest of my natural existence. In other words, as long as I love you.

RICHARD. Hussy! To think that this is the little miss I used to know, the strange, timid little girl who

kept her eyes down and blushed all the time, who always gave me an icy hand! Ah! I upset you just a little in those days!

MARIE-LOUISE. Yes, my dear, but you married the little miss all the same!

RICHARD. I admit that I did. You see, I am a gallant gentleman. [*He stretches himself.*]

MARIE-LOUISE [*crossing her arms, speaks in a formidable voice*]. Well, you gallant gentleman, don't fatigue yourself, above all things! Must I get down on my knees and beg you to help me?

RICHARD. Get up! Get up!

MARIE-LOUISE [*same business*]. Let's hurry!

[RICHARD *starts to unhook her dress.* MARIE-LOUISE *gives him a smack on the hand.*]

Take the scarf off first! Easy! It's caught in a pin!

RICHARD [*obeying*]. Caught *in* a pin! What sort of grammar is that, my poor wife!

MARIE-LOUISE. Yes, caught *in* a pin, a hairpin! And don't bother yourself about my grammar but pay attention to my fichu! If you tear the lace, look out for yourself!

RICHARD. There's your lace! It's pretty, really very pretty!

MARIE-LOUISE. You like it?

RICHARD. It's wonderful! Old English Point I should say!

MARIE-LOUISE. Yes, goose, old English Point! Heavens! how I hate to hear you talk about women's things!

RICHARD. You'll ruin yourself, my child!

MARIE-LOUISE. Not at all, it was a bargain!

RICHARD. Where did you find it? At Mother Breton's again?

MARIE-LOUISE. At Mother Breton's again! You see, I know how to shop.

RICHARD. You are very smart!

MARIE-LOUISE [*who has folded up the scarf very carefully*]. Will you finish unhooking me, Ricky?

RICHARD. Yes, my treasure. This is the worst one yet. It will take me fifty-five minutes! [*He sits down and unhooks her dress behind.*]

MARIE-LOUISE. Do you really think it is pretty, this little dress?

RICHARD. Adorable!

MARIE-LOUISE. Then you did notice it?

RICHARD. Notice it? I was completely taken off my feet! It's a beauty. When you came in, I cried: "Hurrah for Little Aline!"

MARIE-LOUISE. Yes, she deserves it.

RICHARD. I must say, that young person dresses you beautifully.

MARIE-LOUISE [*flattered*]. Yes?

RICHARD. Yes, really! She didn't use to succeed so well.

MARIE-LOUISE. Now, she gets all the models of the big dressmakers.

RICHARD. Well, but when she works for Isabelle——

MARIE-LOUISE [*laughing*]. Oh! *do* you remember that embroidered linen?

RICHARD. What a horror! Isabelle wears it very well, though.

MARIE-LOUISE. Always the same way. [*For the third time since he has begun to unhook her, she turns around and kisses him.*]

RICHARD. My child, if you want me to help you——

MARIE-LOUISE. Oh! my dear, I beg your pardon. [*She turns back.*] Isabelle doesn't go about it in the right way. She tried that dress on twice! She thinks she gets just as good things at that little two-penny dressmaker's as she does in the rue de la Paix. I go to Paquin over and over again. I choose the

model I want, I make a note of some of the little details, and, if necessary, take out my notebook and pencil and make a sketch.

[*Meanwhile* RICHARD *has finished and stood up.* MARIE-LOUISE *has taken off the body of her dress and let the skirt drop.*]

Well? My dressing-gown!

RICHARD. I beg your pardon! [*He hands her the dressing-gown.*]

MARIE-LOUISE. You're in the clouds! What are you thinking about, my dear?

RICHARD. Why, I wasn't——

MARIE-LOUISE. Always about Fernand! Always about the "Affair"?

RICHARD. Yes, I suppose I was. Don't argue about it, dear!

MARIE-LOUISE. No, of course not.

RICHARD. I am suffering with Raymond! We have always been such friends!

MARIE-LOUISE. Yes, I know.

RICHARD. Then you mustn't mind. In spite of myself——

MARIE-LOUISE. Why should I mind? Only, I was wondering——

RICHARD. You know, I can't help thinking of the

way Fernand spoke, I can hear him now! He defended himself so badly—he made so little defence of any kind. Didn't you notice that?

MARIE-LOUISE. He knew he was caught. And then Monsieur Gondoin questioned him so cleverly——

RICHARD. Didn't he! He made cold chills go up and down my back. Fernand is a queer chap! Is he indifferent or just cynical? The way he handed out those banknotes! Everything about it, his replies sometimes vague and sometimes precise, too precise! All that wealth of detail about breaking open the drawer, most of it false——

MARIE-LOUISE. False?

RICHARD. Yes. You can't pick a lock with a penknife.

MARIE-LOUISE. I don't see why not.

RICHARD. What do you know about it?

MARIE-LOUISE. Don't you remember what Monsieur Gondoin told us when we were alone with him? He had paid a visit this afternoon to nearly all of the drawers in the house by means of a knife.

RICHARD. Nonsense! Gondoin used a skeleton key. He was just bluffing. He's playing the man who has tried everything and found out everything.

MARIE-LOUISE. And, by the way, it's not a very nice idea, having this man coming into our room and rummaging through our things——

RICHARD. Well, he was employed to search out the guilty person——

MARIE-LOUISE. To search among the servants!

RICHARD. If he had confined himself to the servants——

MARIE-LOUISE. In any case, I think Raymond might have told him to omit us from his investigations.

RICHARD. But, my dear little Marie-Louise, Raymond never thought for an instant—— [*During the last speeches* RICHARD *has taken out his penknife and gone over to the chest of drawers.*]

MARIE-LOUISE [*suddenly*]. What are you doing?

RICHARD. I'm just trying something. [*Leaning over the chest of drawers.*] I want to see if I'm not right!

MARIE-LOUISE [*she has run quickly over to him*]. Let that drawer alone!

RICHARD. Why?

MARIE-LOUISE [*stamping her foot*]. Let that drawer alone, I tell you!

RICHARD. My! What's the matter with you this evening?

MARIE-LOUISE [*taking him by the hand*]. Come on, Ricky, let's go to bed!

RICHARD. My dear little one, there's nothing to prevent your going into the dressing-room. [*He goes on trying to pick the lock.*] I bet I'll be in bed before you are.

MARIE-LOUISE. Oh! will you?

RICHARD [*sliding the penknife into the groove*]. There! I told you so! See? Why do you suppose he said that? [*He moves away from the chest of drawers.* MARIE-LOUISE, *reassured, goes over to the bed and changes the position of the pillows. Meanwhile,* RICHARD *goes back to the chest of drawers.*] Why, look! If you lift it up—why, it does! Gondoin was right, the drawer is open!

MARIE-LOUISE [*who has run over to him. She slams shut the drawer which* RICHARD *has opened slightly*]. Well, are you satisfied now?

RICHARD [*opening the drawer halfway*]. Splendid locks, these!

MARIE-LOUISE. Are you coming?

RICHARD. Yes, Madame Patience! Marise, my little Marise, what wonderful things we have here! Gracious, what fluff! [*He lifts a little pile of fine linen.*]

MARIE-LOUISE. Heavens! but you are annoying! Put that down! I never meddle with your things!

RICHARD. Sapristi! I never get a chance, these days! I thought that at the first compliment——

MARIE-LOUISE. You're upsetting all my linen!

RICHARD. Upsetting? You impolite person! And just when I was about to grow tender over your fine linen.

MARIE-LOUISE. Oh! have mercy on me! I'm so tired!

RICHARD. Mercy? And just when I was about to burst forth into poetry! [*He puts the things back.*] Good-night, filmy things. [*As he is about to shut the drawer.*] And the photo, the sacred photo!

MARIE-LOUISE [*with sudden violence*]. Richard, don't you touch that card-case!

RICHARD [*seizing the card-case*]. Why not?

MARIE-LOUISE. I forbid you to, once and for all.

RICHARD. You tempt me! [*He moves back, holding the card-case at arm's length.*]

MARIE-LOUISE. If you don't give it back to me right away——

RICHARD [*same business*]. What will happen?

MARIE-LOUISE. I'll never speak to you again as long as I live and breathe!

RICHARD. Impossible!

MARIE-LOUISE. Richard, I'm superstitious—you know it.

RICHARD [*teasing*]. I smell a mouse, a joke! Your irritation, Madame——

[*They struggle.*]

MARIE-LOUISE. Richard, yes or no?

RICHARD. No! [*Joking.*] Madame, you are concealing the portrait of your lover, and I wish to know who he is so that I may kill him. And I shall look. [*He gets away from* MARIE-LOUISE *and opens the card-case.*] And I am caught! It is I after all! It is my own lovely countenance that I see!

MARIE-LOUISE. Now, will you please——

RICHARD [*offering his cheek*]. Kiss first——

MARIE-LOUISE. No, give it back first.

RICHARD. Take it! [*He holds it out to her and then draws it back suddenly.*] How thick it is! What else have you got in it?

MARIE-LOUISE. Nothing.

RICHARD. Excuse me! [*Still joking.*] Letters beyond a doubt, incriminating letters!

[*They struggle again.*]

MARIE-LOUISE. You're not funny a bit!

RICHARD [*feeling the card-case behind his back*]. It feels like parchment.

MARIE-LOUISE. They are some business papers.

RICHARD. Business papers!

MARIE-LOUISE. No! Money! Now, are you satisfied?

RICHARD. Money!

MARIE-LOUISE. What I've saved by my economies! Oh! la! la!

RICHARD. Fancy this little chicken making economies! Why, yes—six hundred francs. [*Looking at the notes which he has taken from the card-case.*] What! Six hundred francs! You have been economical to the extent of six hundred francs?

MARIE-LOUISE [*motionless, in a dry tone*]. It looks like it!

RICHARD [*surprised*]. It's not possible! You have found a way of putting aside——

MARIE-LOUISE. It seems so!

RICHARD. But—but only this morning you asked me—you told me you were running short!

MARIE-LOUISE [*upset*]. I assure you all this conversation is very unpleasant for me. You could very well spare me.

RICHARD. This conversation——

MARIE-LOUISE [*crescendo*]. You've no complaint to make of the way I run the house? Do I do it foolishly? No? Well, then, don't mix yourself up in my accounts, and let my little budget alone, I beg you.

RICHARD. Oh! Very well.

MARIE-LOUISE [*on the point of tears*]. You see how nervous I am, and any one would think you were amusing yourself by——

RICHARD. Calm yourself, my child. I thought you could take a joke. [*Giving her back the card-case.*] Calm yourself and put away your money.

MARIE-LOUISE [*she puts the card-case back into the drawer, and shuts it. A pause. Then, trying to smile*]. Is it my lord's pleasure that we retire now?

RICHARD. I've been begging you to for an hour.

MARIE-LOUISE. Now you're in a bad humor!

RICHARD. Not the least bit in the world.

MARIE-LOUISE. Well then, to bye-low?

RICHARD. Surely.

MARIE-LOUISE [*going toward the dressing-room*]. In one moment, Monsieur.

RICHARD. Very good, Madame! [*She goes out.* RICHARD, *who is no longer laughing, shows signs of great agitation. After a few seconds* MARIE-LOUISE *reappears in the doorway of the dressing-room.*]

MARIE-LOUISE. Ricky-mine, blow me a little kiss! [*He does so.*] I was horrid to you! You're not angry with me though, are you? [*Negative gesture from* RICHARD.] In five minutes I'll make you forgive me altogether! I'll hurry.

[*She goes out.*

RICHARD [*almost immediately*]. Marise! [*Louder.*] Marise!

MARIE-LOUISE [*coming back*]. Yes, dear?

RICHARD. Come in! Come in and shut the door! Now, come here!

MARIE-LOUISE [*coming to him*]. What is it?

RICHARD [*after having looked at her*]. One minute!

MARIE-LOUISE. But what——

RICHARD. One minute!

MARIE-LOUISE. I don't understand!

RICHARD. Give me one minute.

MARIE-LOUISE. You called me——

RICHARD [*brusquely*]. I called you, and now I ask you to give me one minute. That's perfectly clear!

MARIE-LOUISE. You frighten me, Richard! What are you angry about? It's the first time——

RICHARD. You are right. I was wrong to let myself go. Marise, since our marriage there has never even a shadow passed over our love. Until

now no concealment, nothing ugly. At least I have liked to think so.

MARIE-LOUISE [*laughing*]. And now you doubt it?

RICHARD [*taking her hand*]. My wife, my dear wife, I want you to tell me right away how that money came into your possession.

MARIE-LOUISE. Now you're beginning again!

RICHARD. I'm not beginning again, I'm just beginning. And I'm in a hurry to finish. Answer me.

MARIE-LOUISE [*candidly*]. Why, my poor wolf, I economize the way every one else does. I pinch and scrape and bargain——

RICHARD. No.

MARIE-LOUISE. I declare——

RICHARD. No! No! No!

MARIE-LOUISE. Well, Richard——

RICHARD. No! Your ingenuity, your *savoir-faire*, your common-sense has surprised all of us. Without going beyond our income, which is relatively modest, you manage the clever trick of dressing as elegantly as the richest women.

MARIE-LOUISE. Really?

RICHARD. Exactly that. Every day you receive compliments. Well, I admit that this luxury has not represented a very large outlay——

MARIE-LOUISE. Thanks.

RICHARD. But I cannot quite see all your elegance and a saving of six hundred francs in less than a year. Your clever management would become a miracle, and I don't believe in miracles. Please explain.

MARIE-LOUISE. Richard, I am sorry for you! You wound me cruelly, but I am sorry for you with all my heart!

RICHARD. If you are sorry for me, explain the matter right away.

MARIE-LOUISE. You know perfectly well that for four months we've been here at the château as guests——

RICHARD. No! Please! Don't let us start any more of those vague, interminable discussions—— Give me a straight answer! Relieve my mind of what is becoming an obsession!

MARIE-LOUISE. You want to know everything? Very well, then, my six hundred francs does not altogether represent economies. I owe most of it on some bills. I put them aside till later and kept the money. Do you understand?

RICHARD. I'm beginning to. [*A pause.*] So, when you told me that you had amassed that money *sou* by *sou* in savings, you weren't telling the truth?

MARIE-LOUISE [*laughing*]. No!

RICHARD. And you're not telling it now, either.

MARIE-LOUISE [*frightened*]. What?

RICHARD. You're inventing these debts. You always pay your bills regularly. You don't owe Aline a franc.

MARIE-LOUISE. But I have other——

RICHARD. And this morning I saw Madame Breton's account. There were only recent items. All the rest had been paid.

MARIE-LOUISE. Richard, dear, I'm all upset. I can't go on with this any longer. To-morrow morning, if you want to talk it over quietly, I'll account for everything, centime by centime since you demand it——

RICHARD. I'm more anxious than you are to do so. Ah! how much rather I would have had you fly at me in a rage than make these efforts to exonerate yourself—to-morrow.

MARIE-LOUISE. But I'm not even trying to exonerate myself! How dare you even use such a word! What right have you? What are you trying to do, to torture me?

RICHARD. No tears, Marise, they won't stop me. Now listen.

MARIE-LOUISE [*weeping*]. I won't listen to another thing!

RICHARD. Oh! but you must listen. My little Marise, we are built so that we accept, without seeking to verify, the statements of people who are dear to us. Isabelle and Raymond treat you like a little sister and in their ears your words sound as truth itself.

MARIE-LOUISE. But what——

RICHARD. And for all the more reason, I, who love you so dearly, so intensely, I have given you my complete faith——

MARIE-LOUISE [*clasping her hands*]. Richard, I beg you——

RICHARD [*signing her to be silent*]. Please. But sometimes the slightest thing, a glance of the eye, some unlikely gesture, awakens us quickly and entirely! It is terrible! It is just like coming too suddenly, after a calm and quiet night, into the blatant sunlight. And now I am plunged into that cruel glare.

MARIE-LOUISE. I'm dreaming! dreaming! All on account of that wretched fuss——

RICHARD. Pff! Never mind your six hundred francs; let them alone! I'm looking still deeper!

You did not save the money, Marise, for the simple reason that our income is not even sufficient for your expenses.

MARIE-LOUISE. What?

RICHARD. I tell you, our means are not large enough to allow you to keep up the style in which you have been living.

MARIE-LOUISE. You're going mad, I think!

RICHARD. Half an hour ago the idea had not so much as crossed my mind; now, it has become a certainty.

MARIE-LOUISE. What are you accusing me of?

RICHARD. I am not accusing you any longer, I am demanding an explanation!

MARIE-LOUISE. But for God's sake, an explanation of what?

RICHARD. Where did you get all that money?

MARIE-LOUISE. What money?

RICHARD [*seizing the lace fichu*]. The money for that! [*Seizing the dress.*] The money for that! [*Opening the drawer of the chest of drawers and throwing the lingerie on the floor.*] The money for that!

MARIE-LOUISE. You're raving! I'll show you the bills.

RICHARD. I don't want to see any proofs that

you've accumulated beforehand! You reproached me, just now, for knowing about women's things. Well, it's true. I lived a different sort of life before I married you and I do know something about the cost of those things. Only, you hypnotize us, you other women! At a word from you I forgot all that! I noticed nothing any more; everything had for me merely the value of your approval! But, as I told you, the awakening comes! How did you get that money?

MARIE-LOUISE. Bargain sales. Why, this very day——

RICHARD. No more of that! Are all your hats bargains, and all your new dresses that you have for every occasion?

MARIE-LOUISE. Why, Aline——

RICHARD. Aline doesn't work at a loss! Come, Marise, come! I begged for an explanation, but I won't beg much longer. Where did that money come from!

MARIE-LOUISE. Richard, don't shout like that!

RICHARD. I'll shout or not, as I see fit! Where did you get that money?

MARIE-LOUISE. Richard, you'll wake up our friends.

RICHARD. Our friends are not asleep. Where did that money come from?

MARIE-LOUISE. They'll hear you.

RICHARD. What difference does that make to you?

MARIE-LOUISE. It's all the same to me, but for you——

RICHARD. If it's all the same to you, why are you pale with terror?

MARIE-LOUISE. Richard, do you want——

RICHARD: There's no use trying to gain time! I'm not going to let you go until you tell me where you got that money!

[*A pause.* MARIE-LOUISE *turns away her face and lowers her eyes.* RICHARD, *quite close to her, almost whispers.*]

You were mixed up in that business of the twenty thousand francs, weren't you? Answer! Answer me! Every movement you make accuses you! Fernand didn't do the stealing entirely on his own account? Or did you steal, too? Answer me!

MARIE-LOUISE. Fernand did not steal at all.

RICHARD. What?

MARIE-LOUISE [*in a whisper*]. Fernand accused himself to save me. I stole the twenty thousand francs.

RICHARD. Oh!

[*Instinctively he recoils. Then he sits down, crushed.* MARIE-LOUISE *drops to the floor, sobbing bitterly. A long pause.*]

MARIE-LOUISE [*brokenly*]. Richard—Richard——

RICHARD [*without moving, without raising his head, in a thick voice*]. Why did you do it?

MARIE-LOUISE. I wanted to have pretty things —to look pretty—to please you!

RICHARD. To please me?

MARIE-LOUISE. It's the truth!

RICHARD [*shrugging his shoulders*]. Yes!

MARIE-LOUISE. It was my only reason for doing it, for doing anything—my only reason for living at all! It's the truth!

RICHARD. You, you! a thief! I can't grasp it at all—you of all people in the world! A thing like that degrades one, throws one down into the mud, and once there, you never get out again. [*In anguish.*] But, good God! The motive! The reason!

MARIE-LOUISE. My mad love for you—threats, duns!

RICHARD. Threats? What next? I can't believe a word you say any more.

MARIE-LOUISE. I am suffering, Richard.

RICHARD. I don't believe you!

MARIE-LOUISE. I am not suffering because of what you are saying to me, but I suffer because I make you suffer, because I hear that hostile voice and know that it is your voice. If I could only punish myself for my error, for my fault, for my crime!

RICHARD. Every word you speak now rings untrue.

MARIE-LOUISE. Then it's no use for me even to try to defend myself, to try to show you, to tell you——

RICHARD. Yes, go on, all the same! It couldn't be worse!

MARIE-LOUISE. No, it couldn't, could it? But if I can only make you see that my love, my great love, my wicked, foolish love for you, was what carried me away! Richard, do you remember a day—— No! It wasn't then. I must go back further—when Isabelle and Raymond were married I felt a sort of chagrin I'd never felt before. It wasn't envy! I am never envious, exactly. But I kept thinking: I, who am not pretty, nor rich like my friend, I shall never find a man whom I can love and who will marry me; I shall grow old alone. And then I used to weep from melancholy. It happened very often, nearly

every day, it does with most young girls. And then I fell in love with Raymond's best friend, a fascinating, popular man, and I suffered in real earnest. I put you so high above me that I didn't dare even to raise my eyes to you. I hardly confessed my folly even to myself, but I vowed I would never give my heart to any other human being! And then you began to love me. At first I hardly noticed it, and when I did I couldn't believe it. Such a hope seemed too far away to be possible! And while we were engaged I lived in a dream, a strange dream. It seemed to me as though I had won you at a game and was going to lose you again—really! Every day I risked my happiness. And our marriage has not brought me repose.

RICHARD. Words! Words!

MARIE-LOUISE. No, Richard dear. No! No! I am baring my whole life for a year, I am laying it at your feet. For a whole year, night and day, but one thought has been burning in my brain: "I must keep my husband!" I made inquiries about your way of living before we met, I learned about all your adventures. I knew everything. You had been very successful with women, beautiful women, charming women—— I said to myself: "Above all, Richard must not regret the past! I will keep my husband!"

RICHARD [*bitterly*]. You chose a very peculiar way.

MARIE-LOUISE. I didn't begin by doing anything wrong. At first I really tried honestly to get along on our means. I didn't tell lies at first. I went to the small shops, to Aline's. Sometimes I got things that suited me beautifully. But we saw so much of women who spent a lot on their clothes, and in their company I lost all joy, all confidence. So often I watched you without your knowing it, and I could see you making comparisons. And every time you did that it was like a knife in my heart!

RICHARD. Absurd!

MARIE-LOUISE. Yes, absurd! Well, my first pretty dress was the cause of all the trouble. Do you remember it?

RICHARD. I don't remember anything!

MARIE-LOUISE. I ordered it in a moment of madness in the rue de la Paix. I wore it for the first time at a dinner at the Hartman's. You were waiting for me in the little drawing-room, and as I went in to you my heart was racing in my bosom. You didn't say anything—you just looked. You looked at me in the glass without saying a word. Only during the dinner you smiled at me now and then across the

table, a dear little secret smile that nobody else saw, and I felt so proud, so happy, so light-hearted! Everything was rose-colored around me! We were rather late getting back home and on the landing, before you opened the door, you took me in your arms and kissed me, a long, long kiss—and you whispered—I can remember it word for word. Do you see how I've stored up memories of you? You whispered: "Little Marise, your husband adores you." And in that moment I was lost. You don't understand, but a woman would understand. Ah! don't you see, a compliment for a woman in love is like a sudden warmth falling around her—it is intoxication—it is like strong wine, one grows drunk with it. I was lost. From that night I would have nothing that did not come from the very best dressmakers, and their most expensive things at that. Then I wanted the prettiest underclothes, too, and lovely lingerie, and ravishing hats. It had become a need, a mania which grew without ceasing—and the debts grew, too, terribly! One day in February Aline told me that she was sorry, but she could not have me for a customer any longer. During our talk I told her my difficulty. Suddenly, she offered to get me out of it. She knew a woman, a Madame Breton, who would take over all

my bills, new and old. Of course I was to endorse the bills for this person and pay her interest, and oh! yes! what interest! And the two of them, Aline and Madame Breton, to make things look all right, would send me very reasonable bills,

RICHARD [*between his teeth*]. The harpies!

MARIE-LOUISE. I was to pay them back when I could, at my leisure. But after a little while my payments didn't satisfy them. They began to press me, to torment me, to hunt me down, almost!

RICHARD. Why didn't you throw yourself into my arms and——

MARIE-LOUISE. I don't know! I don't know! In April you complained of bad business on 'Change —— And then I should have had to make a clean breast of it all, and at that time!—— I don't know why I didn't tell you! I only know I just didn't. And one day soon after we came to the château I had a terrible talk over the telephone, and then right before my eyes Isabelle threw several thousand francs carelessly into her secretary. Ten minutes later I went through the boudoir and no one was there. As I looked at the desk I felt something give way inside me! Almost without knowing what I was doing, I went over to it and caught hold

of one of the knobs. The drawer wouldn't come open. There was a paper-knife on the table, and—— Richard, Ricky, forgive me! [*She falls on her knees, and taking her husband's hand, covers it with kisses.*]

RICHARD [*bitterly*]. You ask me to forgive you! [*A pause.*] Well, well, stay there, wait for me. [*He gets up.*]

MARIE-LOUISE [*standing up suddenly*]. Where are you going?

RICHARD. To tell poor Raymond that he may sleep in peace, that it is I who will not sleep to-night.

MARIE-LOUISE. Are you going to tell him right away?

RICHARD. After what you've told me? Certainly! He must know the truth!

MARIE-LOUISE. Right away? To-night?

RICHARD. This very minute! What right have I to leave these poor people in misery for even a moment longer than necessary?

MARIE-LOUISE. But——

RICHARD. But what?

MARIE-LOUISE. But—let us talk it over first!

RICHARD. Talk it over! We couldn't do anything different if we talked it over for an hour!

MARIE-LOUISE. Just give me a few minutes—five minutes. [*She bars his way.*]

RICHARD. Marie-Louise, spare my nerves! My head is splitting! One can't stand much of this sort of thing.

MARIE-LOUISE. Richard, I promise you that——

RICHARD. My brain won't work any longer. I can't think at all. There is only a little sharp pain gnawing, gnawing——

MARIE-LOUISE. But you won't refuse——

RICHARD. Yes! I do refuse! I must free myself, ourselves, it is urgent. I must make this pilgrimage at once. Then I shall give myself up altogether to my racking head. To-morrow if you want——

MARIE-LOUISE. To-morrow will be too late! I implore you! Five minutes! Give me five minutes—five little minutes—I entreat you——

RICHARD. Very well. Speak quickly.

MARIE-LOUISE. Richard, what do you intend to do?

RICHARD. Intend to do?

MARIE-LOUISE. About me.

RICHARD. What do you mean?

MARIE-LOUISE. Our life.

RICHARD. I'm afraid this will make a difference.

MARIE-LOUISE. Then you'll let me stay with you? You won't turn me out?

RICHARD. What nonsense! Why, anyhow, I only consider you half responsible.

MARIE-LOUISE. Very well! Now, Richard, listen, and listen carefully! This distrusting pardon that you throw at me——

RICHARD. You're mistaken——

MARIE-LOUISE. Yes! Yes, distrusting! This distrusting pardon will be the attitude of our friends as well. Perhaps they will not go even that far!

RICHARD. I am counting a great deal on their goodness.

MARIE-LOUISE. Don't expect them to do the impossible! For my part, their opinion doesn't matter! I shall regret nothing, not even a break!

RICHARD. Allow me to deplore it!

MARIE-LOUISE. Ah! I no longer conceal anything! A threat would wipe out all my love! Besides, it is no longer a question of me but of you! We are not alike, Richard, we are altogether different, and for your sake I am glad! Of the two, you are the better, you play the finer part, you with your memories, your friendships! Your feeling for Raymond, for Isabelle, brightens your whole existence!

RICHARD. And then?

MARIE-LOUISE. If you married me without so much as a glance behind it is because our marriage in a way strengthened an already dear friendship.

RICHARD. And then?

MARIE-LOUISE. A revelation will break up this friendship.

RICHARD. And then?

MARIE-LOUISE. And then you will carry regrets with you till the end of your days. You might even come to detest your friends. In any case, it will mean unhappiness, Richard!

RICHARD. I ought to have foreseen my unhappiness. Conclusion?

MARIE-LOUISE. Let us try together to find a way not to ruin our future, because unless—I mean to say: by respecting—at least by conciliating——

RICHARD. La! La! Let me help you. You can't get it out, can you? Are you trying one way or another to keep me quiet?

MARIE-LOUISE. Perhaps, but on condition that——

RICHARD. You don't deny it! Well, my dear, you are wasting your breath and you are carrying your lack of principle a trifle far.

MARIE-LOUISE. Wait!

RICHARD. Enough! Enough! You can't make me your accomplice.

MARIE-LOUISE. Oh! but——

RICHARD. You said just now that you and I were different, try and remember it! You insult me without knowing it!

MARIE-LOUISE. And you outrage me without needing to! Why are you making all this parade of your superiority? I know that you are stronger, more honest, more intelligent, and finer than I! If you were not my master, should I love you as I do, to idolatry? In spite of everything, I have the right to hold on to my happiness, to defend it! Richard, do, oh! do let us save our happiness!

RICHARD. Too late!

MARIE-LOUISE. No! not yet! But it will be too late when you have denounced me! Then you will be suspicious of every glance they make, of every movement, you will know that they know, and your love will be dipped in the mire!

RICHARD. I can do nothing.

MARIE-LOUISE. Yes! Yes! You can! I know you can! I have thought of a way—a way that will do, that will be honorable!

RICHARD [*who has again turned to the door*]. Nonsense!

MARIE-LOUISE [*with a cry of despair, catches hold of* RICHARD *and drags him back*]. You promised to listen to me! Don't condemn me without hearing me! It would be hell to have you hate me! For you would suffer! You are suffering already! You love me, Richard, and you are suffering already! It is not a headache you have been struggling against for an hour, but tears. They are there, burning your eyelids. [*Touching his face.*] They are there, waiting to fall! You would never admit it! I know your pride! I have loved you for your pride, too. But the tears are there.

RICHARD. And if they were?

MARIE-LOUISE. I adore you, my lover! We will weep together! I will hold you close to me, I will put your dear face close to mine and I will feel your tears fall upon my eyes, on my lips, on my breast. But don't say anything to them!

RICHARD. What are you asking me to do? To keep Raymond's money?

MARIE-LOUISE. You are mad! You will pay Raymond back to the very last sou! And then you will see with what joy I will do without things, how I

shall sacrifice without a regret all elegance of every kind, the horrid rags, the nasty, horrid things——

RICHARD. I still don't understand, Marise.

MARIE-LOUISE. It's perfectly simple! You manage Raymond's fortune somehow, don't you? You oversee his funds, his cash. Very well, then, without his knowing it you can pay him back the twenty-one thousand five hundred francs.

RICHARD. Impossible!

MARIE-LOUISE. Not all at once! In small sums!

RICHARD. Utterly impossible!

MARIE-LOUISE. Why? I don't know anything about business but it ought to be easy enough to slip in a small sum here and there! You can invent some excuse or other—when it is necessary—and of course each time you will keep some proof——

RICHARD. Marise, I tell you——

MARIE-LOUISE. No, don't tell me! I know by the tone of your voice that there is some hope, some little hope! Listen! Listen! At the end of the week we will leave the château. From now until then you and I and Isabelle will do what we can to calm Raymond, to console him—— A father will only be too willing to find a reason to pardon his son! We will suggest things to him! The best of reasons! In

two or three days he will forget all about this upheaval. I'll manage it!

RICHARD [*weakening*]. No, Marise——

MARIE-LOUISE. And then when it is all done, when we no longer owe a sou of that nasty money, if it will sooth your conscience to make a clean breast of the whole thing, well, then—well, then, you can do it! My fault will seem less grave by that time, less ugly. I won't oppose anything you decide to do!

RICHARD. What are you bringing us to? Wretched child! Criminal!

MARIE-LOUISE [*drawing* RICHARD *toward her*]. Yes! Criminal on account of my love! Little wild slave! I belong to you terribly! I would sell my soul for a caress from you!

RICHARD. Hush!

MARIE-LOUISE. Ricky, I am all yours! Yes, I am your slave! If you ordered me to commit a murder, I should do it! If you wanted me to die, I would kill myself! I am yours entirely! Do what you like with me! Humiliate me!

[RICHARD *places his hand on her lips; she puts it away.*]

Let me! Let me say what I want! I love you! I want you! Take me, Ricky! take me. Come!

RICHARD [*leaning over her*]. My little sweetheart!

MARIE-LOUISE [*on the bed, swooning*]. Richard, I love you, I want you!

RICHARD [*standing up suddenly*]. Ah! I'm losing myself, forgetting the best——

MARIE-LOUISE. My dearest——

RICHARD. Marise, why did Fernand accuse himself? Why did Fernand take the blame on himself?

MARIE-LOUISE. Because I asked him to!

RICHARD. What! What! What! You asked him to!

MARIE-LOUISE. Yes.

RICHARD. When? Where?

MARIE-LOUISE. This evening, in the park——

RICHARD. This evening?

MARIE-LOUISE. When I left you all—when I went to look for Fernand!

RICHARD. Then you did find him? But you came back and said——

MARIE-LOUISE. So as not to awaken suspicion!

RICHARD. Then your return without him, and his entry, it was all stratagem? You fixed it up between you?

MARIE-LOUISE. Yes, Richard.

RICHARD. Ah! [*A pause.*] And you thought it all out then and there, this comedy?

MARIE-LOUISE. I planned it while Gondoin was talking. His mistake gave me a chance of safety—yes—at the price of another crime. Fright inspired me! Have pity, Richard!

RICHARD. You knew you would find Fernand?

MARIE-LOUISE. I saw him go toward the little lake——

RICHARD. In any case, you were sure he would agree? Your calm, your repose——

MARIE-LOUISE. I hoped that he would do me this service.

RICHARD. You didn't have time to ask him to do you a service! No! You were gone only a few minutes—only long enough to give some instructions, an order.

MARIE-LOUISE. An order?

RICHARD [*with a threatening look*]. An order.

MARIE-LOUISE. Well, Fernand agreed almost as soon as——

RICHARD [*too calmly*]. Admit, Marie-Louise, that all this is very strange! I defy you to answer that simple question: how——

MARIE-LOUISE. Don't ask it. It is understood

that I am no longer hiding anything from you, neither my thoughts nor my deeds. I turned to Fernand because he had been making love to me.

[RICHARD *has come back to the centre of the room and* MARIE *has followed him.*]

RICHARD. Making love to you!

MARIE-LOUISE. Just calf love, a schoolboy passion, you know——

RICHARD. Has it been going on a long time?

MARIE-LOUISE. Rather long. Since we came to the château.

RICHARD. And you didn't tell me?

MARIE-LOUISE. The boy didn't seem to me to be dangerous! Besides, I'm not afraid of any man, of any temptation. I love *you!*

RICHARD. You love me and yet for four months you have allowed——

MARIE-LOUISE. I do reproach myself for some coquetry.

RICHARD. Good! Now we've come to the coquetry!

MARIE-LOUISE. I regret it all now, but only on Fernand's account. I ought to have snubbed him before.

RICHARD. Oh! Then you did pull him up short?

MARIE-LOUISE. This very evening!

RICHARD [*more and more threateningly*]. Ah! Ah! This evening! How convenient! Not very severely, I imagine, since two hours later you demanded of him a tremendous self-sacrifice—yes, tremendous! At your request, this boy, who is pride personified, acknowledges publicly a crime he did not commit! It is heroic! It is sublime! But it is curious!

MARIE-LOUISE. I misjudged him, I abused his generosity. I saw in Fernand a really deep sentiment——

RICHARD. Why, it's not a minute since you told me it was only a schoolboy passion!

MARIE-LOUISE. Don't try to mix me up in what I say, Richard. I'm telling you the truth!

RICHARD. Oh! Oh! Well, let us go on along that line! If Fernand did not steal, why did he go so often to our rooms in the absence of Raymond, in the absence of Isabelle, in my absence?

MARIE-LOUISE. And in my absence! He came up here to hide letters that he intended for me.

RICHARD. Then you've carried on a correspondence?

MARIE-LOUISE. No, I've never written him a

single line. If you could have read his letters, you would understand how far——

RICHARD. Of course none of them is in existence now.

MARIE-LOUISE. No. I gave them back to Fernand to destroy them.

RICHARD. You gave them back to Fernand! I see! I see! You gave them back this evening, of course?

MARIE-LOUISE. Exactly. This evening——

RICHARD [*restraining himself with difficulty*]. You trull! Have you done making a fool of me?

MARIE-LOUISE [*trying to embrace her husband*]. Richard, my dearest, my beloved, you're joking!

RICHARD [*repulsing her*]. Ah! Let me alone! You shan't get me that way another time!

MARIE-LOUISE [*violently*]. What are you thinking of?

RICHARD [*bursting out*]. I'm not thinking any longer! I was eighteen once, my dear, like this Cherubino! I used to glide into bedrooms, too! And I would have sacrificed myself the same way!

MARIE-LOUISE. Richard! Take care! Take care! You will say something that you will regret!

RICHARD. I shall regret nothing! I am glad, de-

lighted to see you at last as you are! You didn't employ your slyness only to pick a lock and empty a money-drawer! You've been deceiving me, too!

MARIE-LOUISE [*beside herself*]. Don't you dare——!

RICHARD. You've been deceiving me! You are probably still doing it! Only a mistress gets rid of a toy in that way!

MARIE-LOUISE. Madman! Wretch!

RICHARD [*in a paroxysm*]. Drop those airs of outraged affection! They don't go any longer! You never were in love! A depraved woman, that's what you are! Senses, yes! Vices, yes! As much as one wants of them! More than one wants!

MARIE-LOUISE [*in a voice that makes* RICHARD *be silent*]. Be silent! I command you to stop! It is just your masculine vanity crying out now, and you no longer even reach me! But I won't have you degrade yourself like that! I don't want to love a cad!

RICHARD. Oh! when it comes to insults——

MARIE-LOUISE. It's all understood! I stole! I stole! I stole! Spit in my face! Give me up to the police! Publish my shame broadcast! But I forbid you to defile our past! You shall not touch that!

RICHARD. And I, too, have had enough of your humbug! Good-night!

MARIE-LOUISE [*throwing herself before the door*]. What are you going to do?

RICHARD. Wake your young gentleman, my dear, and say a few words to him!

MARIE-LOUISE. You're not going out of this room!

RICHARD. Am I not?

MARIE-LOUISE. You're mad with jealousy, and I——

RICHARD. Get out of the way! [*He seizes her by the arm and whirls her around.*]

MARIE-LOUISE [*she has fallen on her knees*]. Richard! You see that window! If you go out——

RICHARD. You'll throw yourself out on the rocks, I suppose! I'm not such a fool as to believe that! [*He is at the door.*]

MARIE-LOUISE [*getting up from the floor and running to the window*]. You don't know me, Richard!

RICHARD [*changing his mind*]. Stop! What is the point of all this?

MARIE-LOUISE. You shall not disgrace yourself!

RICHARD. Do you expect to keep me a prisoner forever?

MARIE-LOUISE. I only ask you to think things over! When morning comes act as you think best! But if you go one step out of this room——

RICHARD. Very well! I give in! Come away from there! [*He makes her leave the window.*] But you will gain nothing. We shall pass the night this way, face to face!

MARIE-LOUISE. I didn't expect anything else!

RICHARD [*raising his hand to strike her*]. You jade!

MARIE-LOUISE. Go on, strike me!

RICHARD [*spitefully*]. You would be only too glad! Let us wait thus for the dawn !

Curtain.

ACT III

ACT III

Nine o'clock in the morning. The library of the château. MARIE-LOUISE *and* RICHARD *are discovered. She wears a simple morning-dress and he a lounge-jacket. Both are nervous and fatigued.*

MARIE-LOUISE [*after a long, a very long silence*]. You've decided not to answer any more? [*Impatient movement from* RICHARD. *A pause.*] At least let me know your verdict! And my sentence. [*Another pause.*] What are you afraid of? This abominable night has crushed me morally and physically! I'm not going to run away! I'm not going to struggle any longer. [*Another pause.*] You're wrong, Richard! Why are you making me suffer all this new anguish? What have you decided to do?

RICHARD. I've just sent word to Raymond that I want to see him here. You know what I am going to tell him. Then I'll settle the other account. I shall see if Monsieur Fernand plays as good a game as you do.

MARIE-LOUISE. I congratulate you! Then all hope is over and done with! In five minutes you will have smashed——

RICHARD. In five minutes I shall have done my duty. As to the rest, I beg you——

MARIE-LOUISE. Don't worry! I shan't argue about it! But don't call it duty. At two o'clock in the morning you heard my confession, you knew my fault, my crime, and yet your conscience permitted you to forgive me, to save me. Yes, to save me! And then suddenly, because the most foolish, the most ignoble suspicion crossed your mind——

RICHARD. Let it go at that! But add that it was jealousy that prompted me! And it's true! All the more reason not to argue about it! It sounds all very pretty, but the fact remains that as soon as my back was turned Fernand appeared on the scene, Fernand slipped into your room! [*Movement from* MARIE-LOUISE.] No! Marie-Louise, no! I gave in to your threat! I submitted to the delay you imposed upon me, but now I must know! During these terrible hours, every memory of mine, every reflection and every reply you have given, has brought before me the same miserable suspicion! And now, I tell you, I've got to know the truth!

MARIE-LOUISE [*who has stood up and is near the door into the hall, listening. She speaks softly*]. Hush, Richard! Some one is coming! Richard, I love you, I love only you! I swear that I have never loved any one but you! There is still time! For the last time, I entreat you——

RICHARD [*sneering*]. I admire your persistence. You really amuse me!

Enter ISABELLE.

ISABELLE. Good-morning, dear people.

RICHARD. Good-morning, Isabelle.

ISABELLE. I'm all in fragments! I'm almost finished—dead! Such a night as we've had! Ah! You couldn't imagine——

RICHARD. Oh! yes, I could!

ISABELLE. We didn't even go to bed, you know! It was one o'clock and I still had on the dress I wore in the evening.

RICHARD. Isabelle, I sent a very urgent message to Raymond. I begged him for a few minutes' conversation. Is he——

ISABELLE. Oh! yes! He's coming right down. He was dressing and I hurried on ahead because I

wanted to talk to you two. My dears, a most unwise thing is about to take place. You must prevent Raymond at all costs from carrying out his plan.

RICHARD. What is the plan?

ISABELLE. It's this: Yesterday evening, after that charming conversation here, when Raymond and I got upstairs to our room, the poor fellow went absolutely to pieces. He broke down and cried like a child, with his head on my shoulder. When he had pulled himself together he went to Fernand. Their interview lasted for three hours, three mortal hours, during which I sat up waiting for my husband, listening for his step and wondering when he was coming back! Finally he came, master of himself but very pale, speaking only short sentences in a broken voice, and with gestures, movements, that were not like him at all. He repeated over and over, at least ten times, with a pathetic laugh, "Strange! very strange, they have changed him, utterly changed my son!" I didn't want to question him too closely, but from a few things he said, I gathered that Fernand had shown only a very vague sort of repentance and seemed terribly indifferent. Ah! the poor boy! What an enigma! Soon Raymond begged me to go to bed and leave him to think over the situation

alone. I refused. I opened a book and pretended to read. Raymond was utterly crushed. About dawn, I don't know exactly what time it was, he got up suddenly and rang for them to wake up Aubry, his secretary. Then he looked at me very tenderly, kissed me, and told me in the most natural tone in the world that he had come to a decision, to send Fernand away, out of the country!

RICHARD. Out of the country?

ISABELLE. Yes.

RICHARD [*surprised*]. Ah!

ISABELLE. And for a very long time!

RICHARD [*more quietly*]. Ah! [*A pause.*] Where is he going to send him?

ISABELLE. To Rio, or, rather, to Montefaccio.

RICHARD. To the plantation?

ISABELLE. Yes! Raymond would not listen to my entreaties. Fernand must go right away. He will stay out there two years, until he is of age.

RICHARD [*in a meditative tone*]. Ah!

ISABELLE. You don't seem surprised.

RICHARD. My dear Isabelle, I have to think it over.

ISABELLE. And you, Marise, you don't say anything at all!

MARIE-LOUISE [*torn with emotion, frightened, looking at* RICHARD]. Why, Isabelle, I think as you do—I——

RICHARD [*quietly*]. I should prefer that Marie-Louise kept out of this.

ISABELLE. Really, you astound me, both of you! And yet you are fond of Fernand. He is guilty, I admit that, but there doubtless are circumstances that we do not know about. And, above all, Raymond's happiness! My poor dear is literally tearing himself in two. When Fernand is banished from the house and living, God knows how, at the other end of the world, his father will go on suffering as I saw him suffer last night! No, my dears! I count upon you to upset this scheme which is lamentable, which would be disastrous, which would lead——

Enter RAYMOND.

RAYMOND. Don't let me interrupt you, my dear.

ISABELLE. Raymond, I've just been telling our friends what you have resolved to do.

RAYMOND. That is all right! I was going to tell them myself.

ISABELLE. And since I am no longer consulted, since you ignore my advice——

RAYMOND [*tenderly*]. Isabelle!

ISABELLE. I have urged Marise and Richard very strongly to do all in their power to make you change your mind!

RAYMOND. My dear, please understand that every reason for indulgence has been gone over again and again in my heart and in my brain during this terrible night we have just passed. None of them prevailed! You love me, Isabelle, and you think only of my happiness! But I, unless I want to behave like a wretch, must not think of that. I have to safeguard my son's future for him.

ISABELLE. Only you don't take into account his past!

RAYMOND. Indeed I do! I do not forget it in the least. Fernand has always deserved my utmost confidence and I continue to give it to him.

ISABELLE. You mean——

RAYMOND. I mean that my boy is not yet armed to meet the world as a man. I mean that the first temptation has floored him, that the first petticoat has dishonored him, and that a wench of some kind or other has bewitched him. That is what I mean!

ISABELLE. That is what you suppose!

RAYMOND. Fernand doesn't even defend himself!

During our conversation I waited eagerly for some show of remorse, a tear. But nothing! I waited in vain! Oh! there were tears, yes, but they were shed because of my tears! My son was sorry for me, but it was not pity that I was seeking! [*Signing to his wife to be silent.*] Believe me! Believe me! I must put miles and miles between this feeble lad and this girl, between this wretched boy and Paris, the snares, the temptations of Paris. To-morrow a steamer sails from Pauillac. In a few moments Fernand will leave the house, and this very morning he will take the train for Bordeaux. The trunks are ready and the automobile ordered. Aubry, whose eleventh trip it will be, will go with Fernand and be responsible for him, and see that he never has a loose foot a single moment of his stay there.

ISABELLE. Raymond, it is terrible! terrible!

RAYMOND. Less terrible than you imagine! He won't die of it, God be praised! Brazil isn't such a bad place to live in! I have passed about a third of my existence there and Richard has made the trip five times. Anyhow, what would be the use of prolonging this cruel strife? If he stays here, my poor boy is in danger all the time, and there is no reason why I should not snatch him away to a healthy life,

to his regeneration! Richard, you wanted to speak to me?

RICHARD. Indeed, I did want to talk to you about this business, to offer my help in finding a solution. But after what I have just heard, I have nothing further to say on the subject.

ISABELLE. What do you really think of it, Richard?

RICHARD. In such a serious case it seems to me that the father should be not only the one master but also the one judge.

ISABELLE. Oh! And you, Marise?

[MARIE-LOUISE, *terrified, is almost fainting.* RICHARD *does not take his eyes off her.*]

RAYMOND [*interrupting* ISABELLE, *speaks to* RICHARD]. That's fine, old man. We understand each other. And now I want to ask a favor of all three of you. Fernand does not know yet what I have made up my mind to do, he does not even know that the servants have packed his trunks. I told him to go to the smoking-room as soon as he got up and to come to me here at nine o'clock. [*Looking at his watch.*] He will be here in a few moments to learn my intentions. My dear friends, I want you to be with me, to stay with me. Fernand must take his leave of

all of us—and since last night you heard as I did what he had to say—and since—since in a case like this—I don't exactly know what to do—I am uncomfortable—unhappy—and in spite of myself, I don't feel sure of myself! Will you stay?

RICHARD. Certainly.

RAYMOND [*coming to* ISABELLE, *who is again trying to make him give in*]. Hush! Hush! It must be done!

MARIE-LOUISE [*softly to* RICHARD]. Richard, I'm strangling, stifling! What does it mean? Have you changed your mind? You are not going to speak?

RICHARD [*whispers imperturbably*]. It looks that way.

MARIE-LOUISE [*same business*]. Then why do you encourage Raymond? Why don't you oppose——

RICHARD [*same business*]. I have my reasons.

MARIE-LOUISE [*same business*]. It's atrocious! You'll kill me! I'm going! I refuse to be present at——

RICHARD. You stay here!

MARIE-LOUISE. Richard, nothing in the world would persuade me—to look on at——

RICHARD [*in a very quiet voice but holding* MARIE-LOUISE *firmly by the wrist*]. Stay here!

MARIE-LOUISE [*almost swooning*]. Richard, for pity's sake——

RICHARD [*scarcely articulating the words*]. Stay here!

Enter FERNAND.

FERNAND. It is nine o'clock—you asked me to——

RAYMOND. Yes. Sit down. [*A pause.*] My son, you and I have explained ourselves to each other at great length. You are not going to hear either rebukes or reproaches. I hope that the old Fernand is not altogether dead in you and that he will awaken again a passionate desire to regain your self-esteem. Now a real, a fair restitution would consist in acquiring by your own effort and little by little the sum stolen, and paying it back. Am I not right?

FERNAND. Yes.

RAYMOND. Very well. I am going to give you the means of earning your living and that money as well. Oh, the plan will probably not appeal to you, but in accepting it without murmuring you will already begin to raise yourself in our estimation. You wanted to go into the diplomatic service, but you must renounce that career and become a business man like me. From to-day you are a member

of our business with a salary. I hope you will learn quickly, and after your apprenticeship I will see that you have a share in the profits and ultimately a partnership. You see I have arranged a secure future for you. Only, you know, Fernand, that our principal interests are in Brazil. You will pass, therefore, as all our employees big and little have to do, a certain time in South America. And since the atmosphere of Paris has not been healthful for you of late, I have decided that you had better leave immediately..

FERNAND. Immediately?

RAYMOND. I supposed that after yesterday's incident, a delay of even a few days would be unpleasant. It certainly is looks, memories, that you will want to avoid——

FERNAND. But, father, you don't——

RAYMOND. In short, my dear boy, however you may feel about it, there is nothing for you to do but obey. Good old Aubry who is fond of you and whom you love will be your faithful companion. He is waiting for you at the Gare d'Orleans. The motor will take you there, and to-night you will sleep on the steamer which——

FERNAND. But, father, it isn't possible! It can't

be true! You are not going to turn me out like that?

RAYMOND. I am not turning you out, Fernand!

FERNAND. But how long shall I—shall I——

RAYMOND. You will stay, as has been the custom of our employees, the necessary time, a year at Montefaccio and a year at Rio.

FERNAND [*bursting forth*]. Two years! I am to go two years without seeing you—without seeing you!

RAYMOND [*concealing his emotion*]. Yes, Fernand, two years.

FERNAND. Two years! But it's not possible! It's not possible! Two years! No! Please, please think it over!

RAYMOND. It has all been thought over and you are fighting against it in vain.

FERNAND. But it is terrible! You can't mean it! You can't!

RAYMOND. Don't force me to go into the reasons. You have caused me much pain; don't add torture to it!

FERNAND. Father, think of some other punishment——

RAYMOND. I am not trying to punish you!

FERNAND. Listen! Listen! If I promise you, if I swear to you that in future——

RAYMOND. Ah! be quiet! No more of that! I don't want you to be a blackguard that one has to show the door! Try to go away from us like a good fellow who has recovered himself, who understands and approves! Not another word! [*Taking* FERNAND *by the hand.*] Good-bye, my son, and good luck! [*Draws him to him, much moved.*] Good-bye, my big boy! Come back to me a fine man. [*A short pause.* FERNAND, *as if stupefied, does not move.* RAYMOND *resumes energetically.*] Well! Fernand! You must be getting along! Say good-bye to Isabelle and your friends here—— [*A pause.*]

FERNAND. Very well! [*A pause.*] Very well. [*Almost staggering, he approaches* ISABELLE.] Good-bye, Isabelle.

ISABELLE [*restraining her tears with difficulty, embraces him*]. Good-bye, my dear boy.

FERNAND. Good-bye, Richard.

RICHARD. Good-bye, Fernand.

[*They shake hands.* FERNAND *turns to* MARIE-LOUISE, *who straightens up to keep from falling. Their lips move, but no word is heard.*

Their hands scarcely touch, and then, slowly, FERNAND *goes to the door into the hall. As he reaches the door he turns, and, coming back again, falls on his knees before his father.*]

FERNAND. Father! Father, have pity on me!

RAYMOND. Ah! Go! Go! I am ashamed of your humiliation! Go! Go! Go! You are on your knees, but it is I who am begging you! Go!

[FERNAND, *distracted, gets up and rushes out.*

RAYMOND [*in tears*]. My dear friends, this has been a terrible hour.

RICHARD [*taking* RAYMOND *by the arm*]. And now, Raymond——

ISABELLE. Marise is ill! [*Running to her.*] Marise, little Marise!

MARIE-LOUISE [*stifling*]. No! No! I'm all right! It is nothing! Let me alone! [*She pushes* ISABELLE *away from her and cries out.*] Raymond, run and stop the automobile! It was I who took the money! It was I! It was I! It was I!

RAYMOND. What?

MARIE-LOUISE. Yes! Yes! I did it! But run! Run quickly! Raymond, I tell you I was the thief! I! I! I!

RAYMOND. What is she saying?

RICHARD. It's the truth! It was my wife who stole your twenty thousand francs.

RAYMOND. But——

RICHARD. Do I look as if I were joking? Go, call the boy back!

ISABELLE. Make haste, Raymond!

[RAYMOND *runs out.*

ISABELLE. Richard, will you explain this?

RICHARD. Marie-Louise has got ahead of me and I am very glad of it! Yes, Isabelle, you shall know the whole ugly truth. But I'd like to talk to Marie-Louise alone for a few moments first.

ISABELLE. You terrify me! I beg you to——

RICHARD [*too calmly*]. Excuse me, Isabelle, but I am obliged to ask you to leave us alone together for five minutes. [*Exit* ISABELLE.

RICHARD. Well, I'm delighted! My plan has succeeded beyond my wildest dreams and just as I thought it was going to fail!

MARIE-LOUISE [*astounded*]. What? I don't understand!

RICHARD. Don't play the innocent! You spent the whole night fighting me, trying to keep me from revealing your guilt, the whole night dragging around, clinging to me, indifferent to all I had to say and to

all my anguish! You begged me to keep silent, to be your accomplice! You regarded a denunciation as the worst possible thing that could happen, worse than death itself! And after all your efforts, your labors, your thrills of agony, at the first whine from your young friend, without giving me time to proclaim the truth, you yell it out and accuse yourself at the top of your lungs! [*With a bitter laugh.*] Ah! Ah! Thanks! Bravo! I give in! [*A pause.*] Oh, yes, shrug your shoulders! That's right and proper! But answer me first! Answer me if you can——

MARIE-LOUISE. My poor Richard!

RICHARD. Oh, you needn't pity me! I wanted to see! And I saw!

MARIE-LOUISE. Well, what did you see? Obviously I did not know you were trying any plan! I thought that out of jealousy or anger you—— But enough of this! I tell you that, rather than speak, I should have dropped dead where I stood. But when Fernand went away weeping, when Raymond and Isabelle stood there in tears, although you think I am a woman without a soul—you may be right—a creature of lies and deceptions—well, I felt something, all the same! And so I cried out! I cried

out to save brave, good Fernand! Yes! And I cried out to deliver myself as well, so that our beautiful past should live again, so as to win you, once more, my dearest! I can't make you see, I explain myself badly, very badly—but you must take it into account and believe me! Above all you must believe me! Don't say anything, don't say anything! I haven't done yet! My love, we still love each other! Two people who have suffered what we have just suffered must love each other—— So much the worse for you! You will have to share the lot of this irresponsible Marise, this wretch! Richard, listen to me! You reproached me for my explosion just now, for my avowal! You thought that the invincible force which impelled me to break forth, which put the words into my mouth in spite of myself, was my mad passion for Fernand! I wanted to keep the well-beloved by me! I couldn't endure being separated from him! That was what you thought, wasn't it? Very well, now I suggest to you, myself, that you and I exile ourselves together! That we embark for Rio in his place, to change our country, our very continent, and not come back until you choose! Or never come back at all! I should accept it with joy! Now, isn't that a proof? You can't deny that it is

a proof, a real proof! [*A pause.*] Richard, you don't doubt me any longer? You can't insult me that way now? I mean what I say, Richard! [*Another pause.*] You amaze me! Ah! I don't recognize you! [*A pause.*] I would give everything in the world if I could think of the little things, the facts that would convince you, that would wipe out—— Wait! No! No! I've racked my brains in vain—— [*Suddenly.*] Richard, will you ring and have Fernand sent for? You can question him, ask him any questions you choose. Don't spare me! Compare our answers! That humiliation which I dreaded above all others I will submit to, I demand to submit to it! I wish it! I want it! I want to defend myself, to pull myself out of the mire! Last night when you found the six hundred francs you knew how to interpret my pallor, to read my eyes, my thoughts, and to force me—— Well, use the same means now! Have the courage to let the other man know your suspicions. Bring us together in that very spot! Hurl yourself at him as you did at me for hours on end! Get at the truth, cost what it may, and if you are a man, you will know then that you are outraging me without reason! Go on, Richard, ring! ring!

RICHARD [*who has stood up*]. I will! [*A pause. He walks across the stage and rings the bell.*]

MARIE-LOUISE. I'm glad! When Fernand comes I shall tell him simply to hide nothing from you, and then I shall keep quiet while you question him.

A servant enters.

RICHARD. Ask Monsieur Lagardes if he will be kind enough to come here.

MARIE-LOUISE [*to the servant*]. Monsieur Fernand.

RICHARD [*quietly*]. No, Monsieur Lagardes.

SERVANT. Very good, sir. [*Exit.*

MARIE-LOUISE. Why Raymond?

RICHARD. Have a little patience.

MARIE-LOUISE. Oh, Richard! I am ashamed! I am ashamed!

Enter RAYMOND.

RAYMOND. What is it?

RICHARD. Ah! Raymond, Fernand has told you all about it?

RAYMOND. Not a word. I cannot get a reply of any kind out of the boy! And you may imagine that I am all haste to——

RICHARD. Yes, I can. Well, here is the whole

affair in two words. It is comparatively simple, very easy to understand! First and foremost, your son is innocent, absolutely innocent.

RAYMOND [*an almost imperceptible sigh of relief*]. Ah!

RICHARD. Yes, he never took, he never dreamed of taking, a *centime!*

RAYMOND. In that case——

RICHARD. Hush! Let me tell you! I repeat, it was Marie-Louise who opened Isabelle's drawer—— You shall know the reason. I learned the whole story between one and two o'clock last night. You have known me a long time, Raymond, and known me to be an honest man. So I am going to ask you to believe that my first move was to go directly to your room—only I stopped at the door of my own room. Marise clung to me like a drowning person. I had pity on her. In short, for the first time in my life I wavered between doing right and doing wrong. But I did not have time to hesitate long. Almost at the same moment the most disagreeable of suspicions crossed my mind, laid hold of me! I must tell you everything, straight out! I was jealous of Fernand.

RAYMOND. What?

RICHARD. Yes, jealous. This young fellow is in love with my wife—in earnest!

RAYMOND. Richard! Never!

RICHARD. I'm not joking. Nor is he, either! Your son accused himself, sacrificed himself, because he was in love!

RAYMOND. Then——

RICHARD. He is somewhat young, but at the same time it is rather chic. In any case it is the truth. In short, it is a question of a glorified puppy-love. Under other circumstances I should have laughed at it. [*With a glance at* MARIE-LOUISE, *who is at the point of fainting with happy emotion.*] At present, in my sane and right mind, I don't give it another thought, but last night in the excitement of my discovery and all the other circumstances, my imagination ran riot! I arrogated to myself the right of an inquisitor. I put into the balance the chagrin of a deceived father, the inquietude of a husband who—— No, this is all nonsense I am talking! I didn't weigh anything at all! I never gave even a thought to your own sorrow! I was eaten up with jealousy! I suffered like a child. I wanted to know! This morning I put my shoulder to the wheel again, I encouraged that idiotic, barbarous face-to-face interview!

I wanted to know! I wanted to know and—and now I ask your pardon. Will you forgive me?

[RAYMOND *shrugs his shoulders and holds out very simply a hand which* RICHARD *takes in a long clasp. A pause.*]

Thanks, old man, thanks!

RAYMOND. No!

RICHARD. Yes. [*Pointing to* MARIE-LOUISE *crouching miserably in an armchair, with her face hidden.*] And now, look! Oh! I am not being malicious! I love her better than you imagine, and she on her part loves me, too. She wanted to deck herself out so as to be pretty for my sake, as pretty as the others. Do you understand? Certainly there is nothing worse than stealing, nothing lower! But she is in love, passionately so! When one sees a fellow of my temper, whirling like a cloud of dust, you might say—— And then when she cried out just now, how glad I was! Ever since she spoke to me I have been thankful to her for doing it, for proclaiming Fernand's innocence before me in spite of me! And then, I was in the wrong as well. We men teach our wives only one duty: that of pleasing! When they are desirable, desired, then it is we who triumph. They know that only too well—— In-

stead of making a real companion of my own wife I have unconsciously encouraged her into coquetry. And so, old man, you'll have to forgive her, too; because I love her! Look at me—you know what that means? I love her——

RAYMOND. Well, then, take her in your arms!

RICHARD. One minute! I put one condition to your clemency! Your verdict was that the guilty person should go to Brazil. I agree with you! If you have not lost all confidence in your old pal, I accept now the situation you offered me before my marriage. We are the ones who will embark from Pauillac.

RAYMOND. You don't mean you will start tomorrow?

RICHARD. No, we will go by the next boat. It will take me a fortnight to put my affairs in order, but we shall pass those fourteen days in Paris, at a distance from you.

RAYMOND. No! No!

RICHARD. My dear friend, that idea has taken root in my brain and nothing will dislodge it. The automobile is ready, I believe, and it will take us to Paris. This evening the maid can follow with our trunks.

RAYMOND. My dear children, if it is only to avoid gossip——

RICHARD. Raymond, I know that in the goodness of your heart you will suggest all sorts of plans. Don't do it. We have passed through a devilishly unpleasant time, she and I, and we've got to put out to sea. I assure you——

RAYMOND [*resigned*]. Well, then——

RICHARD. However, we mustn't forget any one—— There is Fernand! We couldn't disappear without seeing him again! That would be pretty bad, wouldn't it? Will you send him in here to me?

RAYMOND. I will—— [*Just as he is going out.*] Marise——

MARIE-LOUISE [*without raising her eyes*]. Raymond?

RAYMOND. Little Marise, I'll wait for you with Isabelle. We shall want to wish you godspeed—to kiss you good-bye. You'll come, won't you?

MARIE-LOUISE [*gratefully*]. Yes, Raymond.

RAYMOND. In a little while, then. [*Exit.*

RICHARD [*after a pause*]. Come here!

MARIE-LOUISE [*when she is close to her husband*]. Richard——

RICHARD. Hush! [*He draws her to him in a long embrace.*]

MARIE-LOUISE. My dear husband——

RICHARD. Hush! Hush! [*A silence. Then, changing his tone.*] Now, how about this young man?

MARIE-LOUISE. Don't be unkind to him.

RICHARD. You needn't be afraid.

MARIE-LOUISE. What are you going to say to him?

RICHARD. I shall say—a lot of things. I shall say: "You've behaved like a young imp and like a young hero." No, no—I shall say that the time of poetry is past, and we must now get down to plain prose. And I shall tell him how Isabelle stood up for him, fought for him as if she had been his own mother. I shall tell him above all——

Enter FERNAND.

FERNAND. Here I am, Marise.

MARIE-LOUISE. Fernand, it was Richard who wanted to talk to you.

RICHARD [*taking* FERNAND *by the shoulders.* FERNAND *is about to burst forth*]. Listen, you! [*A silence.* RICHARD *releases* FERNAND *and says simply:*]

No. [*Then to* MARIE-LOUISE.] Say good-bye to him! [*Exit* RICHARD.

FERNAND. Then you are going away?

MARIE-LOUISE. You have been very good, Fernand.

FERNAND. You are going away?

MARIE-LOUISE. Yes, but I shall never forget what you did. I shall remember it wherever I go.

FERNAND. You are going away for a long time?

MARIE-LOUISE. We are going into exile instead of you. We must. I shall go out of this house with a bowed head.

FERNAND. And the prospect of a second wedding journey doesn't seem unpleasant to you? Well—that is only logical. It's all right, I suppose. Good-bye. I hope you will enjoy yourself!

MARIE-LOUISE. Don't be unjust to me! You mustn't be angry! I'm so afraid, Fernand.

FERNAND. Afraid?

MARIE-LOUISE. Afraid for you.

FERNAND. For me?

MARIE-LOUISE. Afraid to leave you—afraid that——

FERNAND. Ah! You're afraid I might kill myself and cast a gloom over your honeymoon?

MARIE-LOUISE. I'm afraid of your despair. Don't avenge yourself on life by doing anything foolish!

FERNAND. Don't worry! In the first place, I am very stubborn! I shall hope in spite of everything, and wait for your return.

MARIE-LOUISE. Your words are lying, but the tone of your voice speaks the truth! My little knight, I entreat you! Show yourself generous and fine to the very end. Swear to me——

FERNAND. You have my word that——

MARIE-LOUISE. Swear on my head!

FERNAND. What for? If I——

MARIE-LOUISE. Swear it on my head!

[*A pause.*]

FERNAND [*breaking into sobs*]. Marise, you are going! You are going away! I shall lose you! It is torture! Marise, it hurts so! [*He throws himself into a chair.*]

MARIE-LOUISE. It won't be very long before you look back on this suffering with surprise, with the eyes of a stranger. Fernand, dear, you who are weeping now will laugh at it! Yes, you will laugh to think that you ever had any idea of dying for a miserable little creature like me—for Marise!

FERNAND [*stifling with tears*]. You are going away! Going away! It is terrible!

MARIE-LOUISE. The time is getting on! Please——

FERNAND. Don't be afraid! I swear——

MARIE-LOUISE. On my head?

FERNAND. On your head. [*Hiding his head in his arms on the table, he sobs convulsively.*]

MARIE-LOUISE [*leaning over him*]. Fernand, my dear, dear boy! [*She leans farther over him, kisses him, and goes out.*]

CURTAIN.

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